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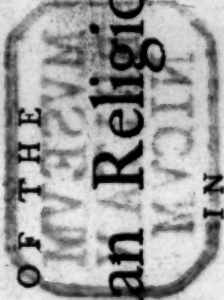
ARGUMENTS

FOR THE

TRUTH

AND

DIVINE AUTHORITY



Christian Religion;

TEN SERMONS:

To which is added

3 Ld

A SERMON upon GOD'S Moral
Government.

By JAMES DUCHAL, M.A.

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DIVINE AUTHORITY

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PREFACE.

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IT hath been often observed, that the exemplary goodness and purity, by which the primitive Christians were distinguished from the world about them, with their amazing patience and meekness in bearing all sorts of ill usage on account of their religion, was one of the most effectual means of recommending it, and engaging others to embrace it. And surely it was very natural to think, that it must be an excellent discipline, and not unworthy of coming from the good parent of mankind, which produced such effects in those, who submitted to it. It is just matter of regret, that so

many at this day, who profess Christ's religion, act a part unworthy of it, and seem to be very little under the influence of its principles in the conduct of life; that vice doth scandalously prevail; and that in many instances, where there is a zeal for Christianity considered as a system of religious principles and doctrines, and men glory in the profession of it, there is yet so little regard had to the laws of it in practice. Still there want not many instances, in which this *wisdom, which is from above*, is seen to possess the heart, forming the temper, and directing the behaviour; and by these we may judge of the excellency of the religion of Christ. To see a person of no more than common understanding, a stranger to all learning and science in religious matters but what is derived from the holy scrip-

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scriptures, by virtue of this discipline only, acting his part in life so as with happy success to serve the great purposes of it ; to see him maintaining an amiable purity of manners and decency of behaviour, abounding in the just and natural expressions of devotion towards God, in the fruits of righteousness and charity towards mankind ; to see him studiously endeavouring to adorn every station of life, by the practice of those virtues, which are suited to it ; making it his first care to approve himself to God and his own conscience, resolved and firm in resisting temptations to evil, and in maintaining his integrity at any expence ; labouring daily to correct what is amiss in his temper and way, and to grow in all good affections and dispositions ; living in the world, as a person who is not of it,

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it, and despising all sensual pleasures and temporal possessions, when compared with virtue and religion, with the favour of his Maker, and the hopes of a happy immortality; I say, to see a person so formed going through life in a manner most reputable and useful, appearing uniform and like himself in all the changes of it; to see him at last meet death with an undisturbed tranquillity of spirit, possibly with great desire and joy, must, one would think, in an attentive observer, beget very favourable sentiments concerning a religion, by means of which all these virtues are carried to so eminent a degree; and one would indeed wonder, if any good man should be an adversary to it. What a pleasing scene must this world be, were mankind universally formed according to this discipline, and constantly

stantly under the influence of the principles of Christianity? And for those happy persons, who have sincerely embraced this religion, and made it their study through the whole of life to act in a manner worthy of it, having thereby effectually answered the purposes of the present state of existence, and having in themselves the sure pledge, and the very springs of happiness in the world to come, how much must they be pleased with that religion, by which nature hath been so improved! And while they look upon it as a religion revealed from heaven, how grateful must they be to the father of lights for such a valuable favour conferred upon mankind!

It hath been suggested, that to produce such characters in life, there was no need of such an extraordinary interposition, as an external

revela-

velation ; that the law, which our maker hath written upon the heart of every man, is sufficient to direct him to the highest perfection of his nature, and to its most happy state ; at least, that the person, who attendeth carefully to the dictates of his own heart, cannot miscarry.

And to illustrate this, the moral philosophy taught by the antients, and the amazing dignity of character, to which some persons, who were strangers to revelation, attained, have been much insisted upon, it appearing in them, how far mere reason and the natural sentiments of the heart will carry men in virtue and religion. In answer to which, it is acknowledged by the advocates for revelation, that indeed God hath shewed every man, by the light of nature, and the law written upon his heart, *what is good*, and hath admirably

admirably furnished him with the powers of conscience for directing his way : and that the person, who hath honesty and strength of mind enough to divest himself of those prejudices and prepossessions, which may have first obtained, and prevented sound reason ; and who maketh it his study to find out what *he* was made for, and what it is indeed to live according to nature, conforming himself in all things to the dictates of conscience, at least, sincerely endeavouring to do so, and by that sincerity prepared for receiving countenance and assistance from his maker : it is readily allowed, such a person will go reputably and happily through life ; will be naturally led to the hopes of his maker's favour, and of an happy future existence. Nor is there any sort of occasion, for the support

support of revealed religion, to depreciate the light of nature and the improvements in knowledge and morality, which have been made by the natural powers of mankind. The question is this, whether in that state, in which things are known to have been and still to be in the Pagan world, there might not be that need of, and these advantages obtained by, revelation, which abundantly justify the wisdom of such an extraordinary interposition in aid of reason greatly weakened and perverted, and the light of nature sadly obscured, and which make it appear exceedingly expedient and desirable? Whether the light of nature and reason was not, at least generally, so clouded and darkened by superstitious prejudices and very gross errors prevailing concerning the Deity and the rules

and measures of his moral administration, the worship and homage to be paid to him, the methods of obtaining his favour, and even about the true ends of life, the supreme good of human nature, and a future state of existence, which are the most important of all things, that a wise man and a lover of mankind would not have accounted a clear revelation, instructing the world in matters of such consequence, the most special favour, which could be conferred upon it. And now that we have in our hands a book recommended to us, as containing a revelation of these things from heaven, and which is perfectly agreeable to sound reason and the natural sentiments of the heart; surely a friend to mankind, even if he did not think it supported with sufficient evidence, would be naturally led

led to wish it were. But when we come to consider the evidences, upon which it is received by multitudes as of divine authority, proofs taken from prophecies and miracles, they at first sight seem to be very convincing; and it appeareth very natural, that a revelation from God should be so attested: these are indeed the proper proofs of a divine interposition. Yet the Christian religion hath been much and with great warmth opposed. For a long time, the civil powers all over the world being set against it, did cruelly persecute all, who professed it, while some men of learning did likewise endeavour to overthrow it by reasoning and argument. Still it prevailed. It hath of late, after seven-teen hundred years possession, been very strenuously attacked, and the opponents among us have not been restrained

restrained from bringing forth all their shew of reason and argument; nor, whatever the importance and gravity of the subject be, have they been sparing of ridicule, which, when just and well supported by reason and nature, may be of great use to make men ashamed of their follies and absurdities; but when it is not so, maketh only the persons, who use it, truly ridiculous. It is to be hoped however, that mankind will at last be determined by argument, and that the unprejudiced world will embrace what is recommended by sufficient evidence.

Whatever force the writers against Christianity may think there is in the objections raised against it, or in the exceptions offered against the evidences, upon which the faith of Christians resteth, certainly the friends of that religion have reason to complain

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plain of the manner, in which these writers have managed the debate, which doth not discover that frankness of spirit and ingenuoufness, that becometh a candid inquiry after truth. The cry of *priestcraft* hath been very loud, and without the least reason. For whatever may in this respect be justly said concerning some particular persons, or orders of men, who have indeed corrupted Christianity, the institution itself must be acknowledged to be at enmity with all such low and hateful art. It giveth no man any authority over another in matters of conscience; but in the most express manner declareth against all such authority: and it doth not so much as suppose, that ever the power of the magistrate should be exerted in support of it by the methods of compulsion and force. Our blessed Saviour

viour never had any such design. His religion plainly referreth itself to the judgments and consciences of mankind, and knoweth no way of recommending itself to their acceptance but by manifestation of the truth. And it forbiddeth among the disciples of Christ all domination whatsoever, and establissheth for every individual an absolute independence in matters of conscience on all the powers on earth; binding every man under the greatest penalties, though not of a temporal kind, to do the will of God, without slavish regard to other authority; and shewing, that it is the right of every man, and his duty, to inquire and judge what the will of God concerning him is. In this religion there are no secrets. Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, are the sum of it. It declareth

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declareth every ingenuous penitent and true believer to be in the favour of God, and pronounceth sentence upon all, who are impenitent; which terms of acceptance no power on earth can alter. Nor can the ministers of the Christian church do any thing, by which a man's state, with respect to the favour of God, is affected, more or less, than any private Christian. Now, if this is a just representation of the genius of Christianity, (whether it is or not, let those, who are acquainted with the New Testament, judge) how unreasonable must it be to bring a charge of priestcraft against it? Wherever that hateful art is found, let it be exposed with all the indignation it deserveth: but let not an institution the most distant imaginable from any appearances of it, or giving any encouragement to it, be so injuriously

riously charged. Indeed, so far is Christianity from giving encouragement to priestcraft, that the true Christian spirit must be at constant enmity with it. For, what is the *Antichrist*, which we see in the New Testament described with such hateful features, but a spirit of domination, supported by all the cunning and arts, and impositions, of priestcraft? No matter who the particular person or persons be, who possess the domination; this the spirit of it, which constituteth the character. And shall we charge Christianity with a production, which, of all things, the genius of it, most abhorreth? And, in truth, to insist upon such a charge, so much as it hath been insisted on, can answer no end, but to mislead the injudicious and inattentive, and seemeth

to be a misnomer of a misnomer.

to be very unworthy of a candid spirit.

Another thing, which may appear not a little surprising, is, that some writers against Christianity have expressed themselves, as if they were above all doubt, that it is a fiction, and that there is not the least probability of its being of divine authority. No man, indeed, ought to be blamed, for setting his argument in the strongest and clearest light, or saying all that he can to invalidate the arguments used by his adversaries, or for decrying what he thinks unnatural and absurd. But who can imagine, that a person of candor, who hath perused the defences of Christianity, published by the ancients and by late authors, will find the evidences they have offered for the support of it, of so little moment, as to give him no difficulty

difficulty in his unbelief? The real truth seemeth to be, that he, who doth not believe Christianity, must, if he giveth himself leave to think, find himself involved in the very greatest difficulties, and under a necessity of receiving and defending things, as repugnant to reason as can well be imagined. Can any man be satisfied, that there never was, in the world, such a person as *Jesus Christ*? No such persons as the apostles *Peter* and *Paul*, and the rest? That there was no such thing as the religion of Christ, taught first in *Judea*, and thence propagated into the neighbouring countries? That there were not such churches as those of *Jerusalem*, *Rome*, *Galatia*, *Corinth*, and the rest, which we read of in the New Testament; nor any such epistles extant, in those days, as are said to

have been written to them by the apostles? Just as well might we believe, that there never was such an assembly as the council of *Nice*, or such an emperor as *Constantine*, who called it. But if, indeed, we will acknowledge there were such persons as *Jesus Christ* and his apostles, and that they did teach such a religion, which was, in a little time, received by great numbers of all nations, and continued to prevail in the world, notwithstanding the most cruel persecutions, till, in about three hundred years after the first publication, it obtained the protection of the *Roman* emperor; it will then be incumbent upon him, who admitteth of the above facts, to inquire how such a religion could obtain; a religion, propagated by a few persons, in direct opposition to all the powers
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on earth, and at so much expence of suffering, and of blood, to the professors of it; and to find out some rational account of this matter, in which he may rest with satisfaction to his own mind. If the gospel history is true, concerning the miracles worked by our Saviour, his resurrection from the dead, and the miracles worked by the apostles, all the difficulty vanisheth, and the matter is easily accounted for. We can no longer wonder at the swift progress of Christianity, nor at the astonishing patience and constancy, with which the professors of it suffered. But if all this history is fiction, then what reasonable cause of this amazing appearance is to be assigned? It is, upon this supposition, evident, that the propagation of Christianity must be owing to the subtilty and craft of those, who

who were employed in it; or to enthusiasm, in them, and the world about them; or to a mixture of both: no other cause can possibly be assigned; for no man ever pretended, that this religion was propagated by force. As to the craft and subtilty of deceivers, unquestionably it may go a great way in imposing upon mankind; and it hath often pretended, even to working of miracles, and to prophecies. But can any man ever imagine, that the spirit of deceit would be at so much pains, to impose upon the world, where there was no temporal interest at all to be served? no selfish end to be answered? Would it persevere in bearing the most grievous sufferings to support the fiction, and, without being staggered at seeing numbers sacrificed on that account? What was it the first disciples of
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our Saviour could hope for? Surely, no stations of power, or places of profit; on the contrary, they had nothing before them, but persecution and suffering, which they began to feel as soon as they made any attempts in preaching the gospel; and there was nothing to tempt any man, who, in his heart, was an unbeliever, to take upon him the profession of Christianity, unless it were, that he might get some share in the public charity, which is a motive, that could have no influence, but upon persons of the very lowest spirits, as well as circumstances. Indeed, as Christianity did gradually prevail, it was not a thing improbable, and the history sheweth it was fact, that men of corrupt minds might study to make some advantage of it, with respect to reputation, or even filthy lucre:

lucre. In the present state of human nature, we may, upon all occasions, expect to meet with such characters. But what is this to the persons, who first propagated Christianity, who first embraced it? Would the spirit of falsehood and deceit lay itself open to all imaginable sufferings and ill-usage; nay, lay itself open to certain martyrdom? This is what no man can believe.

But, as it is utterly impossible to account for the being and prevailing of the Christian religion, upon the foot of mere art and cunning; so he, who would account for it by mere enthusiasm, will find himself involved in as inextricable difficulties. When we come to inquire into the characters and writings of those men, who propagated Christianity, we shall find nothing like
enthusiastic

enthusiastic madness, or phrenzy, in them. Their instructions in religion and morality are such, as the human heart cannot but approve. We see, the tendency of them all is to make men pure, righteous, and charitable; they do, very clearly, point out the true end of life, and the supreme good of the human mind; and by the manifestation of truth, in all these particulars, tend to deliver men from all the follies of superstition, and to beget in them a temper, which is the likeness of God, and in which true worth and happiness consist. This doth not at all look like the ravings of wild enthusiasm; but, indeed, speaketh perfect sobriety of mind. And if we should suppose, that enthusiasm in the persons, who propagated Christianity, was the cause of all that they did; yet that will not

not account for the conversion of such multitudes to the Christian faith. For, to produce this effect, we must suppose the same kind of enthusiasm communicated to all their followers; enthusiasm, in the very highest degree, and by which men were deprived, even of the common use of their own senses. And should a man be able to persuade himself, that the first disciples of our Saviour, and all those who were converted by them to the Christian faith, were miserable, deluded enthusiasts; yet what is to be said concerning the founder of this religion? No enthusiasm can account for his conduct. His character doth not at all look like it; and he must know what gave rise to his appearance and pretensions. He began this great work, and, undoubtedly, had the plan laid in his mind,

mind, and was sensible of the end he proposed to serve. No one but will acknowledge, that there is a consistent design appearing in his conduct, as it is laid before us in the gospels, and a scheme formed, which he stedfastly profecuted ; and in the prosecuting of it, suffered unto death. And, if enthusiasm will not account for *his* appearance and conduct, much less, surely, will a formed design to impose on mankind account for it. It is utterly impossible to bring the character of Christ, as it is collected from the gospels, and that of a deceiver, to consist together. He did not act like one, who intended to delude the ignorant and undiscerning into his service, that he might promote some temporal interest to himself, at their expence ; for he was himself, from his first public

appearance, a constant sufferer, and he was the first martyr in this cause. No appearance of corrupt design in him, no selfish end to be served. On the contrary, all personal appearances of purity, goodness, and simplicity of spirit, with the greatest firmness in pursuing his design to the last. But I shall not enter at present farther into this argument. I hope it will clearly appear, in the following discourses, that neither guileful cunning and art, nor enthusiasm, can account for the propagation of Christianity, and its establishment in the world. It may, however, be observed, that as the impostor and enthusiast are almost opposite characters, if the adversaries of the Christian religion should be divided in their opinions between them, some pronouncing, that religion a mere imposture, and the

the persons, who invented and propagated it, deceivers of mankind ; others ascribing the whole to enthusiasm ; the patrons of these opposite hypotheses may be left to debate the matter between themselves. In the mean time, let it be considered, that the world hath been long in possession of Christianity ; and that it prevailed at first, without any aid from civil power, and notwithstanding cruel persecution, is unquestionable. To what cause are we to ascribe this ? To avoid entering into the inquiry, and totally to neglect any application to it, by which we might come to satisfaction in our own minds, is very inexcusable. Nor can such a total neglect, and inattention, be justified by the number of impostors or enthusiasts in matters of religion, which have appeared in the world, and the de-

lusions they have attempted to put upon mankind. Many of these have perished soon after their appearance, and scarcely any traces of them are left, which should induce any inquiry concerning them. In other attempts, which had more lasting consequences, and concerning which some moments and records are remaining, it is easy, at this very day, to detect the imposture, or the power of enthusiasm, in them, and the methods, by which they prevailed. The case is certainly very different, with respect to Christianity. Instead of a readiness and forwardness in those, who do not believe, to point out the evidence of imposture and delusion, hardly ever any serious attempt of that kind hath been made. But the believer is put upon the proof, of what may be called the negative, which, in ordinary

ordinary matters, is never required.

All possible hypotheses are made, at pleasure, to account for the characters and facts in the New Testament, different from the one, which the believer hath fixed upon; and he must take it upon him to shew, that none of these hypotheses, aided by all the advantages of human invention, can give as rational a solution of the appearances, as the one, upon which he insisteth. The very pretence to divine revelation is thought sufficient to beget the persuasion, or, at least, suspicion of imposture or enthusiasm: and so far it is natural it should be so, while we are only told, in general, that such and such persons have been commissioned from God, to declare his will to mankind, have been instructed in it by revelation from him, and to have assumed a character quite out of the ordinary

ordinary course of nature. But, certainly, upon the hypothesis of a revelation, if the thing be once allowed to be possible, after we have acquainted ourselves with the character and circumstances of the person pretending to this revelation, and with his actions, and the evidences arising from them, if there be nothing in the history and circumstances, to create and support an opinion of imposture or enthusiastic delusion, the nature of fair argumentation requireth, that the character be admitted to be what it pretendeth to be, till something is shewn, which giveth just suspicion of the fraud or wild enthusiasm. However, such is the singular nature and state of the evidence of the truth of Christianity, and so perfectly different from the foundation, upon

upon which all other pretences to revelation have been built, and the manner in which they have been supported and conducted, that unless it is set aside upon this sole consideration, that the character of a person commissioned from God to instruct mankind is so much out of nature, that no evidence whatsoever can make it credible, the advocate for Christianity hath nothing to apprehend ; and is ready to shew, that the characters principally interested in this matter, and whose story is so particularly told and made known to the world, can neither be resolved into imposture or enthusiasm ; but must, of necessity, be admitted to be in reality what they professed to be. And it may be very fairly demanded of the adversaries to Christianity, that they should shew such an extraordinary

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interposition, as that of a revelation from God, to be impossible, and on that account absolutely incredible; or to shew, that, granting it possible, the evidences, by which Christianity is proved to be of divine authority, are not sufficient to beget a rational persuasion of it; or if they do neither of these, to acknowledge, that Jesus Christ was in truth sent of God.

As for the third hypothesis mentioned, namely, that though Christianity cannot be accounted for on the foot of mere imposture or mere enthusiasm, yet there might have been a mixture of both, and that they were combined in the cause, which produced this amazing effect: this will not, surely, be insisted on, as of any weight. There may be some kinds of enthusiasm, which will bear an alliance with imposture, and minister

minister to the purposes of it ; and imposture may likewise give aid to enthusiasm : but in the present case, certainly, the simplicity of the Christian spirit must be supposed to be at enmity with all imposture ; and, on the other hand, it doth not appear, that imposture would serve its selfish and corrupt ends by Christianity. However, if our Saviour and his apostles are fully vindicated from the imputation of imposture, and it is apparent likewise they were not enthusiasts, it is in vain to speak of a mixture of character in them. Upon the whole, it is wonderful, that any person, who hath attended to these things, should express himself, as if he could, without all difficulty, pronounce the religion of Christ to be mere delusion. The candour of such, one can hardly avoid calling in question.

Farther, have not the friends of Christianity reason to complain of the answers given by some of the writers against it to the great arguments, on which believers rely, as very much wanting in openness and ingenuoufness of heart, as well as good sense? For instance, it hath been over and over said, "That miracles can prove nothing but the existence of a power, by which they are worked; that there is no connexion between a miracle and the truth of a proposition; and that no doctrine is to be proved otherwise than by reason and argument." And with respect to prophecy, it hath been insisted upon, "that nothing can satisfy an attentive impartial inquirer, but that he seeth the prophecy fulfilled in the event predicted. That when the event doth not come to pass, according to the plain

plain and obvious meaning of the prophecy, to flee to enigmatical mysterious senses for supporting the credit of the prophecy, and to shew that it may be fulfilled in events, which did not at all correspond to the literal sense, is mere trifling. And what can miracles do in this case? Is the sense of a prophecy to be determined by miracles? Or can miracles prove, that a prophecy is fulfilled, when we see it is not fulfilled?" To such exceptions the apologists for Christianity have given particular substantial answers. But what I would suggest, is this, that to a man, who will think deliberately, and will impartially consider things, all such objections against the evidence from miracles will appear to be mere wrangling, and indeed unworthy of men of understanding. Is there a man of sense

at this day in *Great Britain*, who believeth, for instance, the resurrection of our Saviour; and yet doth not believe him sent of God? Or is it in nature, that this ever should be the case? Let them insist, that there is not sufficient evidence of the resurrection and other miracles, and let that case be tried; but let all exceptions laid against the argument taken from these facts, upon supposition of the facts, be set aside, as utterly unworthy of mention amongst the knowing and candid, until a man of understanding is found, who is convinced by the evidence, that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead, and yet believeth, that he was a deceiver, and his religion an imposture. And I cannot help saying, that to insist on such exceptions is the veriest trifling in a matter of the greatest moment.

And when we are told, that no one saw our blessed Saviour rise from the dead, and that therefore there could be no evidence from eye-witnesses ; is not this perfectly puerile? If men were witnesses to his crucifixion and death, and if this is acknowledged to be undoubted fact, is not their seeing and conversing with him afterwards just as good proofs of his resurrection, as if each of these persons, who thus conversed with him, had been present, when he came out of the grave ? Would fair disputants ever so much as mention these things ?

It hath been alledged likewise, that the advocates for Christianity cannot agree amongst themselves, what it is, and what doctrines it teacheth ; that they have filled the world with debates and controversies about it, not to this day brought

to an issue ; that Christianity, as taught by some, is quite different from what others would have it to be ; all furiously contending for their own sense, and in very few things agreed ; that it is time enough to enquire into the truth and divine authority of that religion, when it is once fairly settled what it is, that men may know what they are inquiring about. To this I would answer, by asking what there is in the whole compass of natural religion and morality, about which there have not been contentions and disputes in the world ? Must we therefore believe, that an honest inquirer shall not be able to attain to the knowledge of the truth in any of these matters ? Is there no such thing therefore as natural religion and morality, because even the principal articles of both have been

been called in question ? Or will a candid inquirer make a wonder of it, that there should be debates in the Christian world, while men are so different from one another in the measure of understanding ; while their opportunities of inquiry, and their diligence in it, are so different ; while from the prejudices of education, they are so apt obstinately to adhere to the opinions, which they have first received ; while many likewise are possessed of such a dread of running into error, as doth effectually and for ever prevent an impartial inquiry, and coming to the truth ; and while many are under the power of corrupt lusts and impure affections, which, of all things, must indispose the minds of men for discerning truth ? Is it to be wondered at, when it requireth great care and attention in some instances,

stances, to understand the true meaning of the scriptural language, which might be perfectly easy and clear to those, whose constant language it was, though not so to us; and when some subjects are treated of, which, it must be confessed, are difficult and hard to be understood? And what if there have been debates about many particulars, such as the decrees of God, the divine agency upon the minds of men; (which, however, are not debates peculiar to Christianity,) about the person and offices of our blessed Saviour, in some things less connected with vital religion; and many other matters, about which men have disputed with too much warmth, so that indeed the true Christian spirit hath been in a great measure lost in the tumults they have raised? Must we therefore imagine,

imagine, that an honest inquirer cannot find out the true design of the religion of Christ, and the way of serving it effectually? Can he not discern what is the true end of life, and supreme good of the human mind? Hath he not a clear view of his duty to God, to his neighbour, and himself, with the addition of the duty we owe to the Son of God, as appointed by the Father to be the only mediator between him and mankind; to whom the utmost gratitude, for what he hath done and suffered for us, and an unreserved obedience, is due? Can he not see, that God, as moral governor of the world, is attentive to the temper and conduct of every individual; and that he will bring him unto judgment for it, rewarding the sincerely obedient, and punishing the rebellious and impatient?

nitent ? Can he not see expreſs declarations, that, upon ſincere repentance for ſin, and a cordial ſubmiſſion to the goſpel, he ſhall be taken into the divine favour and protection, ſhall have all neceſſary encouragement and aſſiſtance in the performance of his duty, and that God will always take care of him, and order what concerneth him in the beſt manner ? Can he not ſee moſt joyful aſſurance of a glorious immortality in reſerve for the righteous, of which our Saviour's triumph over death is the bleſſed pledge ; and that he ſhall be happy in the heavenly ſtate, happy to his wiſh, and beyond all that he can at preſent imagine ? And if an honeſt attentive reader is fully inſtructed in all this by the New Teſtament, what more could a wiſe man wiſh ?

It

It is not necessary, that men should enter into perplexing controversies, or disquiet their minds about matters, in which they see they cannot be competent judges. The way to salvation is plain and easy. To attain to the knowledge of this, a well disposed mind, a sincere heart, are the main requisites ; whereas great penetration and skill in controversies are not necessary. Christianity is intended to be the religion of all, and is therefore within the reach of common capacity. And we are not to attend to what controversies the prejudices and corrupt lusts, or the weakness or folly of mankind, have occasioned ; but what a man of plain understanding and an honest heart may attain to by a careful perusal of his Bible. To argue, that because almost every thing hath been debated, therefore nothing

nothing is to be known and fixed upon as truth, in which the mind may securely rest, is what men would think very unfair in other matters, and true candour will never allow it here.

As for its being a religion not at all founded upon argument, but which relieth upon a strong persuasion and belief, where the moral evidence is not discerned, nor the believer capable, perhaps, of discerning it, which hath been by some objected; this, in the sense urged by the objection, is loading it with an absurdity, of which the genius of Christianity is utterly abhorrent, and which is in the most express terms disclaimed. Our Saviour and his apostles address themselves to the judgments and consciences of men. They produce their credentials, and the truth of what they teach, demanding

manding a sincere and impartial inquiry. They reason from prophecies and miracles, and the nature and tendency of their doctrine: and it is evident they meant, that men should have a fair opportunity of trying and judging. Nor is it to be wondered at, that at the first preaching of the gospel by the apostles, the numbers of converts to the Christian faith were so great, and their conversion so sudden, as that one would think they could not have time for a full inquiry, or forming a deliberate judgment (a circumstance, which hath been much insisted upon for supporting the objection now mentioned) for what they saw and heard might be such evidence to them, that they could not resist it. The testimony of the apostles concerning our Saviour's resurrection, and what they saw the apostles

apostles do in confirmation of this testimony, demonstrating the presence of divine power, and what their hearts felt, may well be supposed to have left little room for hesitation in well disposed minds. As to the state of the case at this day, it may very well be imagined, that many, who are under the influence of the principles of Christianity, are not well acquainted with all the moral evidences of the truth and divine authority of that religion. Yet the consonancy of it to right nature, and its recommending itself to the human heart, is a matter, in which they can well judge ; it is a matter of feeling ; and in this respect every one, who believeth, hath the witness in himself : and in how many instances is the conduct of life and human action put under the direction, not

so

so much of the reasoning powers, as of some immediate feelings and principles of our nature? And a firm persuasion of the divine authority of this religion may produce great effects, where in that kind of knowledge, of which we are now speaking, men are greatly and reproachfully defective. I say reproachfully, because the external evidences of the truth of our religion do not lie so deep, nor are so difficultly comprehended, but that they are written within the reach of very many, who are ignorant of them, merely because they have never attended to such matters. It is, however, enough, if those, who shall enquire, shall find evidence sufficient to convince and satisfy their minds. And in this respect Christianity standeth upon the same foot with the religion of nature,

ture, and, I may say, with all sciences. Many have the use of the principles of them in life, though they are not able to demonstrate the truth of them. Some can demonstrate it; many more are capable of attaining to such knowledge, who will not take pains to acquire it; and some have not the capacity, and must be satisfied to receive things upon trust, as they are taught them. And that there are Christians in this last state, with respect to the evidences of their religion, is not to be wondered at. No doubt it always will be so. But what has this to do with the evidences of the truth of Christianity, which are just the same, whether professed Christians understand them or not? Or what fairness is there in saying, that Christianity doth not rely upon argument and evidence,

dence, because many receive it as truth, without troubling themselves about that matter? Or in saying, that because the gospel requireth faith, as the great thing necessary to our salvation, therefore it meant to disclaim a rational persuasion of the truth, and such as resteth upon evidence.

Some have thought, that a strong objection might be brought against Christianity, from its want of efficacy to make men good and worthy; on the one hand; and from its being the occasion of so much evil in the world, on the other. It hath been asked, what are Christians better than others? Doth not vice as much prevail in the Christian world as in any part of the world? Men are seen to be unchaste, intemperate, unrighteous, false and perfidious, proud and cruel: and why

so much zeal for a religion, which doth so little service in reforming the manners of mankind? A religion, which hath not only been ineffectual to serve that end, but hath been the occasion of so much evil, so much suffering and bloodshed? How many cruel persecutions have been in the world upon the account of it? And with what unrelenting barbarity have men laboured to destroy one another; zeal, as it is pretended, for God, getting the better of all the common principles and sentiments of humanity, and men even glorying in the miseries of their fellow-creatures? And, indeed, the popish hierarchy, especially, hath furnished the adversaries of Christianity with many most tragical instances for the illustration of this; not to speak of the uncharitable persecuting spirit, which hath obtained

obtained in those parts of the world, which have emancipated themselves from servitude to this tyranny. But, say the objectors, must not this religion, instead of being a very valuable blessing to the world, be looked upon by wise men as rather a real and great misfortune to it? And can it be supposed, that the kind and benevolent Parent of the Universe, who taketh pleasure in the happiness of his creatures, is the author of it? All this appeareth, at first view, to have something specious in it; but, when it is examined, will be found to have no strength. Every good man will be deeply concerned, that so much vice of all kinds is found in the Christian world; and that such multitudes, who profess Christianity, conduct themselves in a manner utterly unworthy of it. But as

we see in the Christian world many bad men, do we not see many likewise virtuous and good? Do we not see some eminently so? And can any man be sure, that, in the Christian world, there are not many more virtuous and worthy characters, than would have been, if Christianity had never appeared in it? And that there is not much less of vice and wickedness? Can any person pretend to be sure of this? And must a man, before he can form a judgment, whether Christianity is worthy of being an institution from heaven, go through the world, that he may make an exact computation of the effects of it? This is, in truth, placing the issue upon that, in which no man hath an opportunity of making an exact judgment; and taking him intirely off from that, in which he can distinctly judge.

judge. Is not the proper inquiry to an ingenuous mind plainly this ; whether Christianity, considered in itself, be a fit means of the reformation of mankind ? Whether it containeth right rules for forming the temper and conducting life ? And whether these are enforced by the fittest and most effectual motives ? Whether this religion is not a discipline well adapted to all mankind ? And whether the manifest design and tendency of it is not to make men wise and good, virtuous and happy ? The question to a candid mind will not be, whether the declared end of religion appeareth to be answered, as a good man would wish it to be answered ? but whether the means be proper and well adapted to serve that end, and therefore worthy of the Parent of the Universe to use ? And if Chris-

tianity approveth itself to our judgment, as such a means, and so adapted, here plainly we must rest. From the state of the world it appeareth clearly, that multitudes of wicked men are not, will not be, reformed ; but not that Christianity is not a fit means of reforming them.

As to its being the occasion of so much evil, so much strife and contention, suffering and bloodshed ; and therefore utterly unworthy of being the institution of the Parent of Good, as having been rather a grievous misfortune than blessing to the world : I doubt not but the mention of this will bring into the mind of the learned reader the pretences of the *Epicureans*, who laboured to introduce a philosophy, plainly everfive of all religion ; and intimate, that this was a very kind service to the world, sincere religion had done

done so much mischief in it. Men had, in all nations, from the beginning, worshipped some Divinity or other, in whom they trusted, to whom they poured out their prayers, and offered sacrifices; and a regard to a Divine Providence universally obtained. But the philosophers above-mentioned found, that this religion of mankind had produced so many mischievous effects, enslaved men so to superstition, filled them with such terrors, subjected the unlearned to all those inconveniencies and sufferings, which they were sure of meeting with under the absolute direction of those great but bad men, who made use of religion, as a tool for keeping the multitude in awe; that it was necessary for the service of mankind, to banish religion and the fear of God altogether. And indeed they made

made very great progress in this attempt, and came to have a strong party. But was this reasonable? Is a man to reject all religion, merely because a great clamour is raised against it, as the occasion of much evil? Or is he to judge and determine nothing concerning it, till he hath calculated all the good and bad effects of it, and compared them together? Or is it in this way, that nature directeth him to judge?

But indeed this objection against Christianity, which, as we have seen, has been urged against all religion, might be dismissed at once as most unreasonable; seeing, if we should suppose good done by this religion to such a degree, that, in the opinion of the objectors themselves, it would abundantly justify the wisdom of such an extraordinary

nary interposition, and that the happy effects of it upon mankind greatly preponderate the evil, of which it is the blameless and accidental occasion, and which our Saviour himself predicted ; yet things might, upon a general view of the state of mankind, have the very same appearance, which they have now. And who can pretend to know and comprehend the whole effects and consequences of it, with respect to every individual, to whom this religion hath been made known ? Or who can imagine, that our Maker intended we should in this way judge concerning any thing, especially any thing, by which our moral conduct is to be affected ? What appeareth to be true and excellent, men are directed by the law of their natures to embrace, and by their judgment, concerning the nature

ture and tendencies of things, to regulate their conduct ; not by circumstances and events, which, to the human mind, are incomprehensible, at least not to be ascertained. I say, this objection might be dismissed at once, as what may be really said to be impertinent ; yet as some have greatly insisted upon it, it may not be amiss to observe, farther, how absurd this kind of reasoning, used by the objectors, appeareth in other instances. Let all the mischief, which hath been occasioned by civil associations and civil government, be summed up ; all the tyrannies and oppressions, which have grown out of it, thro' the perverseness and corruption of men in power ; all unjust conquests, all the evils to the subject, which daily arise from arbitrary and despotic government : and how dreadful

ful would the amount be ? Yet would any wise man question, which some men have actually done, whether civil government be preferable to anarchy ? Or must not men fall into civil affociations, till they shall be able to collect all the good and evil consequences of their doing so, and compare the two sums together ? Doth not their own sense, and the apparent necessity and usefulness of the thing itself, convince and determine them ? Or should any one observe, that the cultivating of arts and sciences, the polishing of human nature by knowledge and good breeding, and introducing the elegancies of life and a dignity into it, with that wealth and the means of acquiring it, which is necessary to support them ; and, as the consequence of this, a variety of stations, and outward circumstances among man-

mankind : should any one observe, I say, that these have been the occasions of many vices, which could not otherwise be known ; and that out of such a state of things many wants have arisen, and many lusts and passions, to which the uncivilized and barbarous are strangers ; and imagine therefore, that a state of rudeness and barbarity is preferable to all this cultivation, and that they, who have been the instructors of mankind in the various arts and sciences of life, have been enemies to them ; and their celebrated improvements so many misfortunes to the world : would a wise man believe him ? Or must all arts and sciences be banished the world, until an exact account be taken of the good effects of them, and the evils, to which they have given occasion ; that so a judgment may be formed, whether

whether they should be encouraged or not? Or is this the way, in which the mind of man judgeth, when what is proposed to its choice hath an evident excellency in its own nature? Is there not upon that sole account a full determination of the mind to embrace it? And is it not quite reasonable it should be so?

To add but one other instance, in which some writers against Christianity seem to be defective in point of candour, how hath the Christian morality been attack'd? Our blessed Saviour, as will appear to every one, who peruseth the gospels, taught the love of God, and of mankind, 'as the great things of the law and of our duty. He taught us to love, even, our enemies; and that a sincere disposition to forgive our neighbour his trespasses against us is necessary, that we may obtain forgiveness

ness of God. He enjoined the strictest temperance, purity, and chastity of heart as well as life : He required in his disciples meekness, patience, contentment, indifference to this world when compared with moral perfection and future happiness, self-denial, and every virtue. He insisted on these things, as necessary to a man's obtaining the favour of God and eternal life. And his apostles, in teaching the world, spoke the same things. What is to be objected against our Saviour's doctrine in this respect ? Why, he taught some things inconsistent with the dictates of nature ; for instance, that men should not resist evil.

*But * whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ; and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy*

* Matt. v. 39.

coat,

eat, let him have thy cloke also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain : That is, he taught the greatest liberality of heart, and the greatest patience of injuries ; and this in terms, which, if taken in a strictly literal sense, (not improbably it might be a proverbial way of speaking) is inconsistent with just self-defence, and therefore with the law of nature.

He insisted upon this, perhaps, with a particular eye to those of his disciples, who were to be employed in propagating his religion, and who, of all mankind, had the most need of this sort of patience : And this is made an objection against his doctrine. It may be objected, likewise, that he taught men to † *bate father, mother, wife, children, brethren and sisters, and even life itself ;*

† Luke xiv. 26.

P R E F A C E.

all which is most contradictory to the law of nature, and utterly unworthy of a Teacher sent from God. And are not these *weighty* objections against the purest morality, that ever was taught; and is it worthy of good sense to insist upon them? Look into the New Testament, and we shall find every-where piety and virtue, the strictest and purest, enjoined; and that life, which may be truly said to be divine and the imitation of God, set in the fairest light. And to raise trifling objections from any forms of speech, which might be perfectly easy to those, who were our Saviour's hearers, and which there are few at any time who can be supposed to mistake, is not at all worthy of men of liberal minds.

But I did not intend to go through the many objections, which have been

been raised against the religion of Christ, and which have been often answered; but only to shew, in some instances, that the cause of Christianity hath not been treated by its adversaries with that candour and fairness, which one would wish, and especially in a debate of such moment to the world. Let them argue with all the strength they can; but with ingenuoufness of mind. A candid and impartial inquiry is all, that the friends of Christianity can demand. And such an inquiry only will justify a man to God and his own conscience; and here the matter must rest. However, it may certainly be said, not to be possible, that a person, who attendeth to the many arguments, which have been offered in defence of Christianity, and the evidences of its divine authority, should come

at once to a thorough conviction and full determination in his own mind, that it is all fiction and imposture, and so should, without any remaining doubt or hesitation, reject it. Now, if there be remaining doubt, which, in a matter of such moment, must be always attended with disquiet, this will put an honest and candid person upon farther inquiry, and a more close attention to what hath been said for and against this religion. And for such a serious and impartial inquiry the best, and indeed an absolutely necessary, preparation is a freedom from all corrupt affection, which might bias the understanding. Let the candid inquirer be, upon the strictest examination of himself, well assured, that the perfect purity of the Christian religion doth not raise any dislike of it in his mind; and

and that his becoming convinced of the truth and divine authority of it, would occasion no painful tumults within. This may be very justly insisted upon. For it is to be expected, that where any corrupt affection hath at present the ascendant, it will, though perhaps in a great measure insensibly to the person himself, in whom it prevaleth, greatly hurt the moral discernment. And in such a case, in which a person, if he attendeth, will find himself in some pain, lest the Christian religion should prove true, he is not like to be successful in his inquiries. But where truth alone is honestly sought after, and the mind without bias lieth open to evidence, there the labours bestowed in the investigation of the truth are like to be happily rewarded by finding it.

E 3 It

It appeareth to be one part of the discipline intended for us in our present state, that we should by careful inquiry search after and find out truth. But in matters of the greatest moment to the right conduct of life, the necessity of labouring and taking pains in this way doth not arise so much from any intricacy in the subjects of inquiry, as from prejudices and culpable biases upon the mind, which indeed it may require very great attention and application thoroughly to subdue. But surely this is a business, in which we ought to apply ourselves with great earnestness; † *for if the light, which is in us, be darkness, how great is that darkness?* And as our Creator did not intend, that we should be furnished with knowledge, even of that kind, which is necessary for

† Matt. vi. 23.

our serving most important purposes of life, without the labour of our own minds; so he hath made it our duty to employ our powers with care and integrity in the pursuit of it; and to him we must at last answer for the part we act. If we search after truth with becoming diligence, under the influence of a fixed determination to embrace it, wherever we find sufficient evidence, this will be attended with the approbation of our consciences; this will give us confidence towards God. To apply this to the case of Christianity, and the evidences, by which the divine authority is to be supported; every one seeth, that the truth in this case is not of such a nature, as is capable of demonstration, nor will admit of such an overbearing evidence, as some other things are capable of: but we insist upon it,

that there is such evidence, as the matter, particularly the facts upon which we rely, at this distance of time will admit, and that it is sufficient for the satisfaction of an impartial inquirer. Why miracles are not now wrought ; why we have not evidence from heaven, which would prove irresistible ? are questions, to which no answer is needful. The true question is, whether the evidence, with which we are furnished, is sufficient ; and whether, therefore, the rejecting of Christianity be not owing to negligence of inquiry, or culpable prejudices against that religion ?

But that I may not longer detain the reader, I have only to add, that the following Sermons, preached several years ago, and submitted to the perusal and observations of some friends, whose judgment I value, and

and whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge, are now published, with a view of laying before the reader some strong presumptions of the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion, arising from the genius of that religion, as contained in the New Testament, and the characters of our Saviour and his apostles, as they are to be collected from it. These presumptive proofs, so far as I know, have not hitherto been drawn into so small a compass, and presented in one view; which is all the apology I shall make for publishing this collection of them.

Mr. *Lyttelton*'s excellent performance upon the conversion of the Apostle *Paul* may be thought to have rendered the two discourses upon the life and character of that apostle quite unnecessary; yet I have

have published them with the others, as they bring the evidence into a narrower compass, and were requisite to compleat the design. And there is added a Sermon upon God's moral government, as it is a subject, which hath a near connection with Christianity; and as right conceptions in this most important affair, above all things, prepare and dispose the mind for embracing the Christian faith.

S E R.

S E R M O N I.

Our Saviour's general character considered,

JOHN VIII. 46.

*Which of you convinceth me of sin?
and, if I say the truth, why do
you not believe me?*

THE evidences of the truth of SERM.
Christianity may be summed up I.

under two general heads; namely, the strong appearances of truth and divine authority, which are found in that religion itself, as taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles; and, secondly, the attestations given to it by prophecies and miracles, and the astonishing success, with which it was propagated in the world, though it had no support or encouragement from any of the princes or powers on earth, but found all these set in a strong and obstinate opposition to it.

Many

SERM. Many learned and zealous Christians

I. have commendably and successfully laboured to set the several arguments, taken from these topics, in a clear and convincing light, and have given very substantial answers to the objections offered against their religion. It hath been shewed, that the design and laws of that religion are perfectly worthy of God, most happily adapted to human nature and the great ends of our being; that the prospects, which it setteth before us, by bringing life and immortality to light, are the noblest and most engaging; that the terms of our acceptance with God, declared in it, are perfectly worthy of the purity and goodness of the divine nature, and suited to the present imperfect state of mankind. And it hath been shewed, that there is no part of this religion contradictory to the principles of religion, to the law written upon our hearts, or to the confessed purposes of human life. On the illustration of these things the apologists for Christianity have very much insisted, and very fitly, as the first thing necessary; for if that religion should be found, upon inquiry, inconsistent with manifest truth, contradicting the

law of our natures, and thwarting the true ends of life, it would be in vain to urge arguments for the truth and divine authority of it. What is evidently false, can never be proved to be true; what is evidently wrong, can never be proved to be right.

But when it appeareth, that this religion is not unworthy of God, as the author of it, and that it is admirably fitted to answer the declared design of all religion; though we cannot from this immediately infer, that it is of divine authority, yet we have a strong presumption in its favour, and the way is happily cleared for presenting to the mind the arguments taken from prophecies and miracles, which are direct proof, that it is from God; and indeed, all the direct proof, which can be given.

My meaning is not to insist upon these arguments, nor yet upon the excellency and usefulness of the Christian religion in general; but to lead your thoughts to some internal characters of the truth of it, which have not been so much enlarged upon by Christian writers. And if these shall not appear to be direct proofs, yet I hope they will appear to be strong presumptions.

SERM. sumptions. They are taken from the lives
 I. of its founder and his first missionaries, and
 from their writings.

At first sight it appeareth, that the character of Jesus Christ is very extraordinary; indeed, quite above nature in its present state: for it is absolutely perfect in all moral respects, and such as we do not at all meet with in this world. But not only have the writers of the New Testament introduced a perfect character in life; but they have, from the accounts they give of our Saviour, as the only begotten of the father, raised the expectation of the reader to the utmost. This astonishing character they are to support, with respect to the design, upon which he came into the world; the manner, in which this design was executed; and through a vast variety of incidents, and discourses with such as attended him. Let us consider these things particularly, with fairness and candour, and see, whether there is the least probability, that this character should be fictitious.

The sacred historians evidently set out the foundation of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, the long expected Saviour and King of the Jews. Whether

Whether these prophecies appear to be fulfilled in *Jesus Christ* or not, I am not now

I.

to inquire; or what notions the *Jews* in general, or some particular persons, might have concerning the person, who was to be their Messiah. But the reader, from the first accounts of him, is surpris'd with his being called *Emmanuel*, God with us, a denomination taken plainly from the Prophet *Isaiah*, vii. 14. Here is then a divine person brought upon the stage, and the descriptive characters of him, throughout the New Testament, are suitable to such a beginning. He is the son of God, the only begotten of the Father; standing, therefore, in a relation to him, in which no other person stood or possibly could stand. He is represented as * *the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person*; the name of God is given to him; creating power is ascribed to him, for † *by him all things were created, whether visible or invisible*; and by him God ‡ *made the worlds*; an authority is given to him, to which all things are subjected, he only excepted, who did put all things under

* Heb. i. 3.

† Col. i. 16.

Heb. i. 2.

him.

SERM. I^m. Such are the strains, in which he is spoken of by the New Testament writers.

This divine person is to appear in our world in the form of a man, and his generation as a man is miraculous; conceived and born of a virgin: his conception and birth predicted by an angel, and his nativity celebrated by a multitude of the heavenly host; some persons directed to him by the prophetic spirit, as the son of *David*, and the promised founder of an everlasting kingdom. Here is indeed an astonishing combination of most extraordinary circumstances, to raise the reader's expectation concerning him.

And it will be immediately suggested, for what end did this divine person come into the world? Surely, it must be something very great and important, something worthy of such an astonishing interposition. This great design, the sacred writers plainly intimate, they did at first mistake. They looked for a temporal prince, who should make the *Jewish* state great and flourishing, and subdue the nations to it; making the seed of *Abraham* chief among them, and every way great and happy. But when the counsel of heaven came to unfold itself,

self, we see quite another thing, but un-^{SERM.}

speakably greater, intended. The Son of
God cometh for the redemption and salvation of mankind; to raise them from the ruins of nature, in which, through the prevalence of vice and superstition, they lay; to restore them from a state of guilt and condemnation to the favour of God; to establish a kingdom of truth and righteousness in the world, a kingdom worthy of the Son of God, into whose hands all authority was committed by the Father; and to collect, as the subjects of this kingdom, all the good and worthy of every nation and age into one body, to whom this great Prince giveth, according to the counsels of divine wisdom and grace, eternal life. This is a design, which will be acknowledged to be the worthiest and greatest, that could be formed, in which the world above, as well as this, is deeply concerned. The dominion of our Saviour is not over any nation upon earth, or all the earth only, but over principalities and powers, over all the holy angels; and no doubt, serveth purposes, with respect to them, worthy of such a constitution, tho' not particularly known to us. What we

are

SERM. are principally concerned in, is, that the

I. Son of Man came to * *seek and to save that, which was lost.*

Let us, in the next place, consider the circumstances, in which this divine person was placed, and the part assigned him to act, in order to secure the great end for which he came into the world. The Son of God appeareth in a manner, which became him : the power of the highest is seen to rest upon him ; from him the blind receive sight, the lame obtain health and soundness, the deaf are made to hear, lepers are cleansed at his command, devils are cast out, the dead are raised, he calmeth the tempestuous sea by his word, and, in some instances, shewed a power to create : and as he came with the glory of a power, which became the only begotten of the Father, so he came with the fulness of grace and truth. But he appeared without any of the pomp or greatness, the riches or authority of this world ; he was in a mean and low external state : His supposed and his real Parent, though of the royal line, yet of no figure in the world ; *Joseph* a person, who earned his sustenance

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• Luke xiv. 10.

by the labour of his hands ; his mother a SERM.

I.

Our Saviour had no possessions of his own, and as it is possible, that, before he entered upon his public ministry, he wrought with his hands, so during the course of that, he was supported by the benevolence of others. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs ; he was despised, reproached, and persecuted by the great and who were accounted the wise in the Jewish nation ; and, at the last, their prejudice so prevailed against him, that he was seized, tried, and put to death as an impious malefactor, to a death most painful and infamous. This he himself had predicted. * *Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death ; and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify him, and the third day he shall rise again.* At first sight, a most extraordinary scene, for a person of such dignity, and in the prosecution of such a design, to go through ; and than which nothing could be more offensive to, or lay in

stronger • Matt. xx. 18, 19.

F 2

stronger

SERM. stronger prejudices in the minds of the

I. *Jews* against him, as they expected in their
Messiah a great temporal prince, and therefore would look upon what befel our Lord as demonstration, that he could not be the Saviour of *Israel*.

But yet in this manner he fulfilled the prophecies, which went before concerning him, and devoted himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of mankind. • *No man could take his life from him; he laid it down of himself, and with perfect resignation bore the sufferings, to which, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, he was delivered; thereby doing the highest honour to his heavenly father, and by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, fully answering the whole intention of divine wisdom, in appointing such an amazing interposition and sacrifice, as the means of our deliverance from the power and penal consequences of sin: to which sacrifice full authority to pronounce remission of sin to the penitent was annexed; and to which, as a great means, our salvation is ascribed.*

• John x. 18.

Therefore

Therefore this matchless person, who SERM.
was crucified, died, and was laid in a I.

tomb, was not suffered to see corruption. As he had acted the most benevolent and useful part to mankind, and the most worthy and pleasing in the sight of the Father, he was rewarded by a glorious resurrection from the dead, by being received up on high to the Father's right hand, invested with all power in heaven and on earth, and with an universal dominion, which he will hold till the time of the restitution of all things, *when he will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all.* This is a conclusion of the scene, which, it must be owned, is worthy of the representation, which is given of the great design, and of him, who sustained the principal part in the execution of it.

But having thus considered the excellency of this person, the design, upon which he came into the world, the circumstances and manner, in which he appeared, and the part he acted, it will be proper to look more particularly into his moral character, as that may be collected from the sacred

SERM. writers, who give us the history of his
I. life.

It hath been already observed, that he is represented as quite above all moral infirmity. * *He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And though such a character is quite above human nature in the present state of it, yet it is maintained through a great variety of discourses and actions. His enemies could not convince him of sin; no word spoken by him, or deed done by his hand, could lay a foundation for the least reproach. Nothing the evangelists ascribe to him, which is unworthy of him, which is not in character.

But that he was without sin is the lowest thing ascribed to him; we find every thing excellent in his character.

How great his piety towards his heavenly Father! How perfect his resignation to the Father's will! † *I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him, who sent me——† I have meat to eat, that ye know not of; for my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* And in his address

* † Pet. ii. 22. † John vi. 38. † Ib. iv. 34.

to the Father, *John xvii. 4. I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work, I.*

which thou gavest me to do. And when he came to the last dreadful scene, of which it is apparent he had the greatest sensibility, his language is, * *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; yet not my will but thine be done.* He constantly spoke, constantly acted, as a person, who had nothing in view, but to glorify the Father, to execute his blessed counsels for the happiness of mankind, and with the utmost zeal to serve his cause at any expence to himself.

To his piety let us add the perfect simplicity of his spirit. Here was no mean low end proposed, which required cunning, or the arts of hypocrisy to serve it ; but a design the worthiest imaginable, pursued in the natural and proper methods, with the greatest openness and frankness, and in the face of all possible, and that the most unreasonable and provoking, opposition. How worthy of the simplicity of his spirit, and becoming of himself, is his answer to *Pilate*, when he stood before

* Matt. xxvi. 39.

SERM. him in judgment, and was examined with
I. respect to his pretensions to be the King of
the Jews ! * *Art thou a king then ?*

*Jesus answered, thou sayest, that I am a king :
for this end was I born, and for this cause
came I into the world, that I should bear
witness to the truth : every one, who is of
the truth, beareth my voice. I have no king-
dom upon earth, but what is founded up-
on truth ; I am to make no conquest,
otherwise than by convincing the judg-
ments and consciences of men, and gain-
ing them to the belief of sacred truth,
and a submission to it ; and every one,
who is disposed to embrace the truth, will
become a subject of my kingdom. I pre-
tend to no other dominion, and surely this
can never be hurtful to Cæsar. And as
his kingdom was not of this world, so he
did not need the arts of this world ; nor is
there any thing, of which he expresseth
greater abhorrence, and which he more
directly opposeth in his laws, than corrupt
selfish views and hypocrisy. He pursued
his own design uniformly and steadily,
taught mankind plain and necessary truth,
and laid down his life in confirmation of it.*

* John xviii. 37.

He

He did not flatter the great, nor address SERM.

himself to the powerful for protection and

I.

defence; he spared no vice, and could not indulge men in the negligence of any virtue. He knew, that the world, that is, the persons, in whom the spirit of the world reigned, must hate him; he mourned over, but was content to bear it; meditating no mean way of escaping their malice, any more than he revenged it. His power, which would have crushed and destroyed them at once, was never exerted in prejudice to his enemies; * *for he came, not to destroy mens lives, but to save them.* He went constantly on towards the great mark he had in view, welcoming every circumstance or event, which lay in the way to it, or could contribute to his gaining it.

But in conjunction with this simplicity of spirit, we find a *sense of dignity* and a *greatness of mind*, which became the Son of God; the most distant indeed from the haughty air and the supercilious brow, which speak a little and contracted, not a great spirit; but shewing themselves in the vastness of his design, the steadiness of his

* Luke ix. 56.

execution,

SERM. execution, his utter negligence of this

I. world, and all, which the children of it account great and happy, and in frequent expressions, which became a character the most significant in the creation of God, and exalted to the highest dignity in it. He layeth the foundation of the most glorious of all kingdoms, and is the head of a body, in which angels and men may be said to be united. He cometh, singly, to serve the greatest and most important purposes to the world, which the heart of man can possibly conceive. In doing this, he stoppeth at no suffering whatsoever, and sheweth a temper, upon which no impression could be made, which should be to the disadvantage of his cause, or divert him from pursuing his great design. And though veiled with the greatest humanity, he often uttered sentiments, which became his matchless dignity, and a person, who filled such an important station in the moral world. * *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me—* † *As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and to give it to whomsoever he will.—* ‡ *I give*

* John xii. 32. † Ib. v. 26. ‡ Luke x. 19. unto

unto you power to tread on serpents and scor-serpents, and over all the power of thy enemy. I.

¶ Thinkest thou now, that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently send me more than twelve legions of angels: but how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? — ¶ All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me. But above all, in his expressions in that admirable address to the Father, which we have in the 17th of John's gospel, which I shall have an opportunity afterwards of considering more particularly.

Let it be farther observed, that this sense of dignity was attended with the utmost meekness and lowliness of spirit? ¶ *My servant shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man bear his voice in the streets.*

He was all gentleness, meekness, and confession; never saying or doing any thing, which had the least appearance of anger; except what sprung from such a zeal for the honour of his heavenly father, as the coolest and most dispassionate thoughts must approve. He shewed, that he could despise no man, who was capable of being the object of his beneficence. His few

* Matt. xxvi. 53. † Ib. xxviii. 18. ‡ Ib. xii. 18.

stated

SERM. Stated attendants, not in the quality of ser-

I. the people: his manner of living was of the lowest kind; publicans and sinners, who were prepared to repent and amend their lives, were his welcome companions, his language is, * *Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart.* — † *The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many.* — ‡ *If I then, your lord and master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* — || *Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? But I am among you as he that serveth.*

And lastly, let the overflowing benevolence of his heart crown his character. He came down from heaven upon the most gracious and compassionate, as well as the greatest design. In executing of it, he went about doing good unweariedly. Wherever he came, the substantial monuments of his

* Matt. xi. 28.

† Ib. xx. 28.

‡ John xiii. 14.

|| Luke xxii. 27.

charity

charity and grace were left behind him. SERM.

I.

He so loved mankind and loved the world, that he gave himself for them. And his favourite disciple justly representeth a fulness of grace as his glory. *The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth.* His love was stronger than death, and surely greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends. But in him we do not only see the greatest benevolence and good will, but likewise the greatest tenderness and delicacy of affection, which every one will acknowledge to be a beautiful part of character in human life. Indeed, dispassionate benevolence towards all beings capable of happiness, and complacency towards worthy moral characters, are perfection in its utmost extent. Yet tenderness, sympathy, and the delicate passions and affections, which are planted in the heart of man, though often in themselves painful and the cause of sufferings, speaking therefore, imperfection, still are essential to the character of a perfect man, and are most rich ornaments of humanity.

John 1. 14.

and

SERM. and they discover themselves very naturally
 I. in our Saviour. See him at the grave of
 Lazarus; see him weeping over the obstinate *Jerusalem* doomed to destruction; especially see the most affectionate and true friend, in his last discourses to his disciples, in which the reader will observe the greatest tenderness, but nothing weak or feeble; on the contrary, by the most generous, elevating and stable consolations, he endeavours to satisfy their minds against the apprehensions of suffering, and sendeth them into the world, prepared as he was, to carry the great point they had in view to themselves and to mankind, at any expence of toil or pain they could possibly undergo.

Time would fail to speak of every thing which might be advanced upon this subject. How great our blessed Lord's patience, and constancy, when at the same time there appeared the very greatest sensibility, of what he suffered! How engaging his expressions of goodness to his enemies, even in the extremity of his pain and agony! What just indignation must even perfect innocence feel at the returns, which he met with from those he came to serve, (and which seemeth

seemeth plainly to be expressed in these SERM.

words, * *Are you come out as against a thief,*

I.

with swords and staves, to take me) yet a temper is always preserved worthy of himself. And here it would be proper, particularly to consider his character as a teacher; but this shall be the subject of a distinct discourse.

In the mean time, it will be acknowledged, that there is a most astonishing character brought upon the stage. The end to be served, by the appearance of this divine person, is the greatest, which can be imagined, and every way worthy of him. The character is perfect purity of manners, the greatest piety and devotion towards the Father, the utmost greatness of mind and humility in conjunction, the largest benevolence, and the most delicate and tender compassion; firmness and constancy, and a perfect simplicity of spirit; and it must be owned, that this character, though quite beyond nature, is maintained with exactness, and from the first appearance to the last, a happy uniformity in it. Now, let us inquire into the probability of its being fictitious; or whether it doth not appear to be copied from the life.

• Matt. xxvi. 55.

Here

SERM. Here it ought to be observed, that there

I. is not in all the accounts we have of our blessed Lord, by the evangelists, any thing like laboured description. No appearances of any rhetorical art used; but a plain simple narrative of what came to pass, and of what our Saviour spoke and did. His character is great beyond expression; but the reader is left to collect it from an account of facts. The design, upon which he came into the world, is not at once explained; but unfoldeth itself by degrees, and the historians intimate plainly enough, that for a long time it was not understood by them. Such artless simplicity in representing plain facts surely doth not look like fiction, or the fruit of a labouring imagination. Let it be added, that here doth not appear the least intention or care to guard against any objections, which might arise in the minds of persons, who should peruse this narrative; or to obviate difficulties, which might occur to them. The astonishing scene is laid before them; and those things in it, which were like to be most obnoxious, in the greatest simplicity, and without any savings, and the reader left to judge upon the whole. Many things

things there are in the history of the evangelists, which must be exceedingly offensive to the *Jews*; particularly, the doctrine of the cross, and the accounts given of them and their religion, so much to their disadvantage; with the predictions of that sad catastrophe, to which the *Jewish* nation

was to be brought: many things, which were like to be offensive to others, and which the less thinking and attentive, especially such as were prejudiced against all pretended miraculous interpositions of the Deity, would consider as unanswerable objections against the truth of Christianity; and which, to this day, are urged by the adversaries of it. Now, should it be supposed, that a person of genius, equal to the task, had set himself down to frame such a character and such a life, it must be granted, that he would have been sensible of lying open to many objections; and that he would have taken care, to mention no facts, which were obnoxious, or to have suggested what might obviate the difficulty arising from them: but we see no such thing in the gospel. It doth not appear, that ever it came into the minds of the writers, to consider how this or the

G

other

SERM. other action would appear to mankind ; or

I.

what objections might be raised upon them. But without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you ; at no pains to think, whether they would appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony, there is no help for it. They tell the truth, and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like sincerity, and that they published nothing to the world, but what, upon the best evidence, they believed themselves.

But what is most of all to be considered is this, that it is utterly incredible, that the apostles were capable of framing such a character as that of our Saviour ; such a grand design to be served by him ; such means of serving it ; and of supporting such a character through innumerable incidents and speeches, as they are recorded in the gospel. If indeed they write nothing, but what they saw with their eyes, and heard with their ears, nothing was more easy ; but if all was fiction, how unequal were they to it ? In truth, no one can think, that such an extraordinary person and character ; such a design to be served by him ; such a kingdom, intirely spiritual, and which

which hath nothing to do with the king-SERM.

doms of this world, to be given to I.

him, should ever enter into their imaginations. Or, if such a character should be suggested to their thoughts, such a glorious kingdom, that ever they should introduce him to the world in circumstances so low, a man despised and rejected, a constant sufferer, and at the last crucified; and though raised again from the dead, yet leaving this world, no more appearing to mankind or visibly interposing in their affairs, but said to be advanced to the Father's right-hand in heaven. Who can imagine, that this is all the creature of human imagination; especially of such as the evangelists?

But to think of their furnishing such incidents, such actions and speeches, by which this character is so happily and uniformly supported, such a sense of personal dignity, such greatness of mind, such purity, such goodness, such intimate relation to the father, and sentiments so worthy of it: who can consider this impartially without acknowledging, that their account is the very truth, to which they were eye and ear witnesses?

G 2

If

SERM. It hath been said by some of the adversaries to Christianity, that the writers of

I. the New Testament are of a very low character; that their writings are very confused; it is hard to understand their meaning in many passages; they do not seem to have had any clear ideas themselves, or the faculty of communicating their conceptions clearly to others: and yet these weak and illiterate and perplexed writers have laid before the world a character, which neither a *Homer*, a *Virgil*, or a *Milton*, could have framed; and a design greater and more important, than could have entered into their imaginations. And what shall we say upon this? Surely, the men, who will have this gospel history to be a fiction, must be at least greatly surprised, that the evangelists should be capable of such a work; surprised, that they should venture upon it; much more, that they should so happily succeed in it.

There are two remarkable incidents in the gospel history, which appear to be very natural, and which will make it extremely probable to any attentive reader, that at that time the apostles did not at all understand our Saviour's real design. The first

first is, *Matt. xx. 20. Then came to him the SERM.*

mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, I.

worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, what wilt thou? She said unto him, grant, that these my sons may sit, the one on thy right, the other on thy left hand, in thy kingdom.

This earnest desire of a fond mother, who, no doubt, spake the ambitious imaginations of her sons, gave occasion to our Saviour, in a manner very worthy of him, to explain to them the spirit and temper, of which his disciples ought to be, and which would be pleasing to him, and an imitation of him; *ver. 25. Ye know, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they, that are great, exercise authority upon them: but so it shall not be among you. But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. I allow of no strife amongst you for place or station; no selfish or ambitious views; all the contention must be, who shall be most charitable and humble, and the most dili-*

SERM. gent in kind services to his fellow men-

I. *W* e have clear intimations in the gospel history, that the disciples of our Lord were often engaged in such contention, about place and dignity in our Saviour's kingdom ; and this might be expected, and that they should want to have the matter determined by their master. But it is plain, they were dreaming all this while of a temporal kingdom, such as the *Jews* expected that of their Messiah to be ; and that they had no idea of a kingdom, not at all of this world, and in which there was no temporal power or authority to be shared.

The other incident we meet with in *Luke xxiv. 19.* When the two disciples were going from *Jerusalem* to *Emmaus*, and talking together of the crucifixion and death of our Saviour, he drew near and went with them, but unknown to them, (the historian tells us, that their eyes were holden, that they should not know him) and fell into conversation with them. Upon his asking, what they were talking about, so sad, and melancholy, they tell him, it was about *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, a prophet mighty in word and deed before
God

God and all the people ; and that the SERM.
chief priests and rulers had condemned him I. ~
to death and crucified him ; adding, they
*trusted it had been he, which should have re-
deemed Israel ;* intimating, that now all
their hopes were gone. This shews, that
they had no idea of that kind of redemp-
tion, which our Saviour was to effect. It
was owing to the same mistaken way of
thinking, that *Peter* rebuked our Lord,
when he had a considerable time before
told his disciples what he should suffer for
the *Jews ; * Be it far from thee, Lord,
this shall not be unto thee.* And upon other
occasions they shew, that they had no no-
tion of our Saviour's suffering unto the
death, and of being by that means raised
to his kingdom. Nay, after his resur-
rection, they were still in expectation of a
temporal kingdom ; + *Lord, wilt thou at
this time restore the kingdom to Israel ?* So
that it is plain, a spiritual redemption and
a spiritual kingdom was what they had no
notion of ; and indeed it is not to be sup-
posed, that ever they would have thought
of such a design, or set themselves to plan
out such an administration : A government,

* Matt. xvi. 22. + Acts i. 6.

SERM. in which the son of God, as his Father's
 I. minister, exerciseth all power and authority in heaven and earth, and giveth unto his faithful servants eternal life; sealed for this purpose by the father, that he should carry into execution the glorious purposes of his grace: but in which administration, the *Jews* were not to be distinguished by any advantages above other nations, farther than that the gospel should be first preached to them; but all nations in the world, without distinction between *Jew* or *Gentile*, *Barbarian* or *Scythian*, bond or free, were to be one in Christ Jesus, and intitled to the same privileges; than which, nothing could be more disagreeable to the sense of things, which then prevailed amongst the *Jews*, or more inconsistent with the vain hopes, which, as the seed of *Abraham*, they had conceived.

From these and several other passages it seemeth to be plain, that the apostles did not at the first understand our Saviour's real design; but thought, as the other *Jews* did, of a great prince in a glorious earthly kingdom. And, as hath been observed, it is no way probable, that a kingdom entirely of a spiritual nature, as that of our Lord

Lord really is, should have ever entered SECM.

I.

into their thoughts. But if they are supposed, being disappointed in their first views, to have set themselves to frame another and quite different scheme, and capable of succeeding in it, it is beyond all conception, that they should have left upon record their own gross mistakes in their first attempts, and have not only, upon their disappointment in one scheme, gone into another, but told their readers they did so, exposing their own weakness to the censure of all men. But this I shall have occasion afterwards to illustrate more particularly.

Upon the whole, here is a character and a design to be served by it, which are worthy of one another; and the design executed in a manner so extraordinary, that it may be truly said, they are beyond all the creations of human genius; much more above the contrivance of a few poor illiterate persons, who seem to have had no sort of intention, but to persuade the world to believe what they themselves saw, and heard, and knew, to be true. Nay, the evangelists do not appear, to have so much as consulted together, and compared the accounts

SERM. accounts, which they were severally to lay before the world; but each to have represented:

L things, as they were suggested to his own mind, which occasioneth that diversity in their accounts, with respect to some particular circumstances, that hath given rise to many objections, though indeed frivolous, against them: they have apprehended no ill consequence from this, have been at no pains at all to prevent it: One may venture to say, that Christianity will never be overthrown by argument, while such a character as that of our Saviour, and so supported, lieth open to the ingenuous and impartial. How came we to have it here? is a question, to which a person, who doth not believe Christianity, will never be able to give a substantial answer.

It may be, perhaps, suggested, by persons, who are acquainted with the history of the world, and the theology, which obtained among some Pagan nations; that it is not so wonderful a thing, that the writers of the New Testament should have got an idea of such a divine person as the son of God, and have framed a scheme of his appearing in human nature and conversing with mankind. Many nations, which are

accounted

accounted barbarous, have had some such SERM.

I.

notions among them; and in the philosophy, as well as fables of those, who were more improved and polished, foundations have been laid for such superstructures.

To this I answer, that still it seemeth very unaccountable, that men should have been led merely from their own natural sentiments and reasonings, to imagine any thing of this kind, to which there is nothing in the visible works of God, that necessarily directeth them. And therefore many learned men have thought, and given very plausible reasons for it, that these doctrines and opinions, which we meet with in the Pagan world, are in truth originally derived from some early revelations, which were made to mankind concerning the Son of God, and his appearance upon earth. And it is certain, that such, as were acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Messiah, and the accounts we have there of the appearance of angels, and especially of one called an Angel, and very particularly pointed out, who presided over the *Jewish* state, might be naturally led to conceive of such a divine person, as the Son of God is in the

New

SERM. New Testament represented to be. But

I. be pleased to observe, that the strength of the argument doth not lie principally in their having formed an idea of such a person; but in their introducing him upon the stage in the manner they have done, in allotting to him such a part to act, such business, such ends to serve, in their conducting the whole to such an issue, and supporting the dignity of such a divine character. These are things, which seem to be above all the mere invention of many things, which could never be expected from such persons as the apostles of our Saviour. We may therefore, with the strongest probability, conclude, that it was what they saw and heard, which they declared to the world.

It will be owned readily, that such an interposition of the Son of God, his suffering and dying for us, is a most amazing event, and what is enough even almost to overwhelm an attentive mind. But when we have good evidence of the fact, if it doth overwhelm, it is with joy; that such notice should have been taken of our world in a corrupted state! that the happiness of mankind is an object so dear to the Parent

Parent of the Universe ! that our immortal spirits are of such value in his sight ! I.

His grace indeed is ineffable ; and what ingenuous spirit can resist the attraction of it ? What will, or possibly can, move the heart of man, if such goodness and love have no effect ? Love, which it is distress how to represent in a proper light ; all the power of language sinketh beneath it : but surely the heart of a sincere Christian must feel, and be ever sacred to him, who hath so loved us.

S E R

SERMON II.

Our Saviour's character, as a teacher
of morality.

MATTHEW VII. 28.

*For he taught them as one having
authority, and not as the Scribes.*

SERM.
II.

HA V I N G, in a former discourse,
treated concerning the general cha-
racter of our blessed Saviour, as it
is collected from the evangelists, and of the
great ends he came to serve, and the mea-
sures, which he pursued for attaining to
them, as strong presumptions of the truth
of Christianity ; and having shewn, that
the accounts, which the sacred writers have
given us of their master, are not their own
inventions, but true and simple representa-
tions of facts : I shall, in this discourse,
proceed more particularly to consider the
character

character of our Lord, as a teacher of SERM.

II.

peareth from what he taught, to be, in the highest degree, probable, that he was a teacher sent from God, and that God was with him.

In entering upon this argument, it may be very proper to consider, what is to be expected from a teacher, sent of God to instruct mankind in morality. And to satisfy this inquiry, it must be observed, that the foundations of morality, which are laid in nature, are unalterable; and must be the same, to all mankind, in all ages and circumstances. These foundations therefore must be presupposed in all instructions whatsoever; such as, that there is a right and wrong in principles, affections, and actions; and that the mind of man hath a discernment of this. The original ideas of right and wrong, of fit and unfit, of lovely and vile, in temper and behaviour, are not to be got by instruction; but, like other simple ideas and perceptions, are raised in the mind by presenting the object to it. And, indeed, if there were not such original sensations in a man's mind, the words used to express them

SERM. them could to him have no meaning. But

II. there are not any perceptions more familiar ; all men have them, and know how differently the mind is affected, when a very good and a very bad action is presented to its view. Right and wrong, good and evil, are the objects of conscience, which is undoubtedly the most important part of our frame ; and every person, whose mind is not in a monstrous state, must be sensible of its approbation or condemnation, as he doth what is good, or the contrary ; and, if he hath the spiritual senses exercised aright, must know the pure joy, which is annexed to his acting his part as it becometh him ; as also the grievous pain, that springeth from doing what his own heart condemneth. But it is certain, that moral impurity, and corrupt prejudices, may greatly hurt the spiritual discernment ; and evil habits, and familiarity with vice, may very much abate the horror, with which gross immorality striketh the mind in a right state of its powers : nay, farther, by mere errors in judgment, men may do what is evil under the notion of good, and look upon an action, which is really good, as fault and transgression. Here then

then is a large field for moral discipline; SEAM.

II.

that mankind may be delivered from those prejudices, which corrupt the mind; and, that the spiritual senses and discernment may be restored to their proper strength and delicacy.

Again, when the mind reflecteth upon the sense of right and wrong, which God hath originally planted in it, and upon that joy, which is annexed to the doing of good, and on the pain, that attendeth criminal actions; and that the powers of conscience, from which these springs, may be greatly weakened, but cannot be quite eradicated from our frame; it is an easy and natural step, and, indeed, to the attentive an unavoidable one, to consider this sense of things, as a proof, that the Author of the Human Frame is a Being, who is himself sensible of right and wrong, in the most perfect manner; and who approveth the former, and condemneth the latter: and moreover, that the sense of good and evil, which is common to all mankind, is to be considered as God's law written upon their hearts. From which, it is a natural consequence, that he, who is the Author of that Law, will be attentive

H

SERM. to our actions; that our doing what is right will be pleasing to him, and our doing what is wrong displeasing and offensive: which we cannot believe, without proceeding a step farther, and being persuaded, that he will make his pleasure and displeasure sensible to his creatures, in rewarding the good, and punishing the bad.

II.

This seemeth to be the language of nature, and, at first sight, appeareth to be of very great consequence. Indeed nothing can be of greater; and the state of mankind must appear in a very different light, as it is or is not believed, and virtue have an unspeakable additional strength given to it; or, on the contrary, taken from it. And as mankind have erred in nothing more, than in their speculations concerning the divine government, concerning God's rewarding the conduct of his creatures with approbation or disapproval, the methods of obtaining his favour, and what the fruits and consequences of his favour or displeasure will be to individuals; so nothing could possibly be more desirable, than a clear and full instruction in these matters, and such an account of the government of God, as the mind must rest in, with full satisfaction.

Farther

Farther, many and great have the debates of writers, upon moral subjects, SERM.

been, concerning the best end and supreme good of man. And it may seem very } II.

amazing, that a matter, in which every man is equally concerned, and which, one would expect, should be perfectly plain to all, should admit of so much controversy.

But there is not, perhaps, in the world, a more remarkable instance of perplexing that, which is clear, by dispute and argument, than this; for if there be given to mankind a standard of right and wrong, by which they are to direct the whole of their conduct, and from which they are, upon no account whatsoever, to depart; then, assuredly, that state, in which such a conduct shall issue, is all, which can be intended for such a creature: the principle upon which his Maker willeth that he should constantly act, must conduct him to that end, which the Author of this Principle, and of his intire frame, intended for him: In other words, *moral perfection* is that, which must be continually in his aim; and what can this chief end be, but that, which is to be, above all things, in his aim; and which, if he is continued

SERMON in existence, must be for ever in his aim?

II. Surely there can be but one end, where there is but one way; and he, who pursueth the latter, will attain the former.

Now, let us suppose a teacher sent of God, for the instruction of the world in morality; what are we to expect from him in that particular capacity, but the establishing and reinforcement, by divine authority, of that sense of right and wrong, originally given us, which is the foundation of all; by letting men know, that their Maker intended, and acknowledgeth this as his law; that he will act the part of a moral ruler, and interpose to testify his pleasure, or displeasure, as men do, or do not, comply with his law; and this, in such a manner, as is suitable to his most perfect wisdom and goodness, and will best answer the end of a moral administration? His establishing, therefore, conscience upon the throne, as the supreme governing power in man; his delivering men from those prejudices, which spring from evil affection, custom, human authority, or whatsoever other source; pointing out to them their duty, and teaching them to avoid evil; thus, bringing them back to the simplicity

simplicity of truth, and a just sense of SERM.

moral obligation ; these things come II. }

within his office, and when this is done, all is done, which can be expected from a teacher of morality. He doth not come to give original powers or principles, new simple original ideas or sensations ; but to vindicate nature from the oppression of it by vicious affections, and habits, and unjust combinations of ideas ; to restore conscience to its dominion, and establish the determinations of it by divine authority. In a word, such a teacher must proceed upon the foundations, which the Author of Nature hath laid ; and that with such plainness, that his instructions may be adapted to all, and may recommend themselves to the heart and conscience of every man. All men are not capable of comprehending philosophical accounts of the frame of nature, the system of its powers, and of moral obligation ; nor are capable of pursuing truth through long deductions of consequences from first principles : that is, all men are not fitted to be philosophers : But all men know a right and a wrong ; all men have, in some measure, moral sensations and discernment ;

SERM. discernment; and are capable of understanding the instructions, by which their

II. duty is clearly pointed out to them. And when these instructions are given as laws from God, with the sanction of his authority, and received and submitted to as such, the design of instruction is happily answered.

Now to apply this to our blessed Saviour's instructions in morality; no one, who peruseth with attention what he himself hath taught, as his disciples recorded it, and what they have taught as they received it from him, but must see, that this divine teacher had himself a thorough knowledge of human nature, and of morality. It may be truly said, that no man ever taught like him; and had he intended, in a philosophical manner, to have treated those things, which are the subjects of his laws, how easy had it been? But then, how far from being the properest method, as hath been already observed? Of all things, in a teacher of morality, whose dictates all are to understand and obey, simplicity and plain address to the heart and conscience are most necessary. And when men are clearly instructed, in what

what God and nature require of them, SERM.

II.

tions of our Saviour ; becoming one, who knew what was in man ; and how to apply himself to those principles and springs of action, which, when properly touched, every man must feel, and be sensible of their power. And no person, who is so happy as to put his instructions in practice, but what must be raised to an intire character, so far as is consistent with the imperfection of our present state ; or, in the scriptural language, *stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

To illustrate this, it would be the most natural method to go through all the branches of morality, as they are taught in the New Testament. But this is a design too large for me at present to pursue : I shall only make some general observations, which concern the whole of our duty, as our Saviour and his apostles have set it before us ; and then consider some of the principal things, and which are most essential to a good and happy life.

We may observe, in the first place, what stress is laid upon simplicity and sincerity of spirit in doing the will of God,

H 4

according

SERM. according to the best judgment we can

II.

form, and to the dictates of our consciences; upon our acting, in reality, from those principles and affections, from which we pretend to act. Our Saviour hath insinuated this upon his disciples, and in the strongest terms; shewing them, that acts of devotion and charity, without an upright intention of serving the true ends of them, and a suitable affection, are all lost labour, and cannot be acceptable to him, who knoweth the heart, and seeth in secret; and very fitly compareth hypocrites (who put on the plausible appearances of righteousness, that thereby they may conceal naughty hearts) to whited sepulchres, which are rich and beautiful in external decoration, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness; assuring us, moreover, that our acceptance with his Heavenly Father dependeth intirely upon our doing our duty from the heart. And the Apostle Paul observeth, that it was his rejoicing, that *in simplicity, and sincerity of heart, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, his conversation had been in the world.* And the

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

Apostle

Apostle John teacheth, * that if our hearts SERM.

II

condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. But every one, who hath attentively perused it, knoweth, that this runs through all the writings of the holy scripture; and that our hopes of the favour of God are suspended upon that sincerity, which is essential to a right state of the mind. † If the eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light; but if the eye be evil, the whole body shall be full of darkness.

The disciples of Christ have no hopes given them, by him, but what must be founded on fairness and honesty of heart, in learning and doing the will of God. Not the external act only, but principally the affection of the soul is required, as that, in which the very essence of obedience consisteth; so that, if a man would † give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, without charity, it would profit him nothing. And we see the sum of the law of God, as taught by our Saviour, is, that || we should love the Lord our God,

* John iii. 20.

† Matt. vi. 22.

‡ 1 Cor.

xiii. 3.

|| Matt. xxii. 37.

with

*SERM. with all our hearts, and our neighbour as
ourselves.*

II.

Secondly, the disciples of Christ are directed to do the will of God, and to pursue the dictates of their own consciences, without any regard to the consequences of their doing so, with respect to their temporal state and interest. They are to avoid evil, and to do their duty, not only at the expence of denying themselves to all the gratifications of irregular appetite and desire, but at the expence of loss and of suffering, even to death. And this may be very properly termed the preliminary, upon which men are to become his followers; and, accordingly, it is often inculcated. He frequently forewarned such, as followed him, in the days of his flesh, that if they were faithful to him, they must expect to suffer deeply: and this is his law to all his disciples, that they should suffer even to death, rather than violate their consciences, and do that which is evil. This is doing the utmost honour to the divine laws, and to that sense of good and evil, which God hath planted in the heart, and must approve itself to every ingenuous mind. Men are directed by their natural consciences

sciences to act an honest and a worthy SERM.

II.

part, whatever the consequences of their doing so may be to themselves and their own interest; they are to suffer any thing, to risk any hazard, rather than do that, which is dishonourable and base. But, in cases, where a person cannot maintain this integrity, but at the hazard of all, which is dear to him in this world, and of life itself, how natural is it, in the conflict of passions, which such a situation occasions, to look up to the Author of Nature, (whose law it is, that all considerations whatsoever should give way to that of truth and integrity) as to him, from whom the pious sufferer must expect favour and protection, and in confidence, that he will not permit his sincere servants, to suffer finally by doing his will? And, indeed, reason alloweth us to hope, that, if not in this, yet in another state of existence, God will interpose to redress the grievances of his loyal subjects, and to right their wrongs. And this hope our blessed Lord hath fully established, by the most express and clear declarations. In the mean time, it is evident, that the spirit of a true Christian must be at constant enmity with the spirit and

SERM. and genius of this world; and he must reject, with abhorrence, the solicitations of it, to postpone the consideration of what is right and fit, what is lovely and pleasing to God, to conveniency, to ease, to pleasure, or to temporal interest. The great question, with an upright disciple of Christ, will always be, what God requireth of him, what is his duty, and fit and becoming him to do?

Thirdly, the obedience, which our blessed Lord requireth, and which is declared necessary to our acceptance with God, is of an ingenuous and liberal nature; the service of a child, not of a slave; not the effect of mere terror and apprehension of punishment, but of a cordial and affectionate choice; arising from the love of God, a sense of duty to him as a father, and a desire to imitate and be like him; from love and gratitude to Jesus Christ; and from a sense of the excellency of true religion, and holiness, (which are not only consonant to nature, but the only perfection of it, greatly strengthening all the worthy and most pleasing affections of the heart) and of the unspeakable advantages, which flow from the

the practice of them. It is true, the Su-SERM.

II.

irreconcilable to wickedness, and as a friend to the righteous; but as who will assuredly inflict dreadful punishment upon the impenitently rebellious against his authority; and hath in reserve a glorious reward for the obedient: all which the heart must approve, as perfectly agreeable to our notions of God, considered as the supreme righteous moral governor. And the scenery of the world to come is set in such a light, as may most effectually work upon the fears and the hopes of mankind; This is necessary to make such impressions upon the minds of bad men, who are under the power of corrupt lusts, as may alarm and put them upon serious thinking, and engage them to form good resolutions, and to enter upon the reformation of their lives, in spite of the opposition given by evil inclinations and habits; and this representation is of the greatest use, in supporting good men under the severer trials of their integrity; and in giving a great additional force to the sense of moral obligation. But, that men should continue acting from mere dread of punishment, or mere hope

SERM. hope of reward, as distinct from the dig-

III

nity and excellence of holiness, and the perfection of it, to which the purest des-
light is annexed; that is to say, that they should act from principles intirely selfish and servile, was far from being the intention of our divine teacher. He very well knew, that, when converts to true religion were delivered from the tyranny of sinfull lusts, and passions, and had attained to a just discernment and sense of moral excellency, and had tasted the pleasures of true holiness in the practice of it, nobler principles would take place; and that what might have its beginning from mere terror, and apprehension of punishment, would be continued and carried on to its perfection, from taste and affectionate choice: that the mind, set free from the power of evil affections, and habits, would do good from desire and inclination, which must ever be the case. Hence our Saviour says to the Jews, • *that if they continued in this word, then should they be his disciples indeed, and they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free.* And agreeably to the best philosophy, he

John viii. 31. *that if they continued in this word, they should know the truth, and the truth should make them free.*

speareth,

speaketh, *John* iv. 14. *Whoſoever drinketh ſer-
of this water, ſhall thiſt again; but who-*

II.

*ſoever drinketh of this water, that I ſhall give
him, ſhall never thiſt; but the water, that I
ſhall give him, ſhall be in him a well of water,
ſpringing up into everlaſting life. The water,
that I ſhall give, my doctrine and ſpirit
ſhall ſo poſſeſs the heart, as to make it an
inexhauſtible ſource of enjoyment and
happineſs, which always muſt attend a
right moral ſtate. The Apoſtle Paul in-
fiſteth very much upon this argument;
and repreſenteth the true Chriſtian ſpirit,
not as a ſervile one, but moſt liberal, act-
ing from the beſt principles, and the moſt
generous motives; ſuch are, the affectionate
duty we owe to God as a father, a grateful
ſenſe of the love of God and of Chriſt, and
the good-will we owe to mankind; and he
is very particular, and explicit, in diſtin-
guiſhing the ingenuous obedience of a diſ-
ciple of Chriſt, from that, which mere
terror might extort from the reluctant;
ſhewing, that, from a renewed nature,
Chriſtians obey with reliſh and ſatisfaction;
and that being made like their heavenly
Father in diſpoſition and temper, they
imitate him in practice. But there can be
little occaſion for proving, from paſſages
of*

SERM. of scripture that, which is plain from the
 II. very nature of the thing; for, surely, that

obedience, the sum of which is *love*, must be of the liberal kind. The love of God, and of mankind, are the noblest and most worthy principles, which can actuate the heart of man: and the obedience, which springeth from them, must be most ingenuous. At the same time, the hope of reward is a mighty encouragement to the industrious cultivation of these principles; and as there can be no accepted obedience, where these principles are not, so, where they are, the virtue of obedience is not at all lessened, by the strength and encouragement given to them by the promises of the gospel.

Having made these general observations, let us take a more particular view of the Christian morality, and consider the principal lines of it.

It hath been just mentioned, that our obedience is summed up in the love of God, and of mankind; which may be said, indeed, to comprehend every thing, as these principles will dispose men to the performance of their whole duty. Thus our blessed Saviour, * *The first of all the com-*

* Matt. xxii. 37.

mandments

mindments is, thou shalt love the Lord thy SERM.

God, with all thy heart, and with all thy II.

soul, and with all thy mind; and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

It is not possible, that men should have a just idea of God, as the almighty parent, as the infinitely wise and perfectly righteous ruler of the universe, a being of unbounded goodness, (which, as it appeareth in all his works, so is manifested in its greatest glory in the gospel of our Saviour) without being also sensible, that they owe him the greatest love, and most affectionate and dutiful obedience. And when the mind, free from corrupt biaſs, and prepared for the exercise of that affection, which the object tendeth to raise, contemplateth perfect purity and goodness, unerring wisdom, and almighty power, all in eternal necessary conjunction, as constituting the character of the Supreme Being, the Father of our Spirits, veneration and love must be excited to the highest degree.

This pure and sacred affection is greatly strengthened by another, different indeed from it, but having the same tendencies ;

I
namely,

SERM. namely, gratitude for the innumerable favours, conferred on us by the bounty of

II.

our Maker; and especially, for the great and precious promises, he hath given us. We contemplate mere goodness with approbation and love; we regard goodness, in substantial favours conferred upon ourselves, with gratitude: and these two must be inseparably connected in our affection toward the Deity.

Our Lord hath very justly declared it the first and great commandment, that we should love the Lord, with all our heart, and soul, and mind: this command is, indeed, of the highest importance in morality. And, in this respect, he teacheth in another manner than the boasted philosophers of the world, who were before him; in most of whose writings, however particularly they descend into the recommendation of social virtues, yet we have very little notice taken of the love of our Maker, and of the duty, which we owe him. But every one, who will attentively consider these matters, must see, that just apprehensions concerning the Supreme Being, a sense of his presence with us, and that he is our moral governor, sincere love, and affectionate

affectionate duty to him, are of the utmost SERM.

II.

Where the love of God obtaineth in the heart, there must be a desire and determination to please and do him honour in all things. And as obedience, springing from this principle, must be cordial and sincere, ingenuous and liberal, so it must be uniform and universal: for the same reason, that men obey in one instance, they will obey in all instances. And where persons do what is in itself good and right, with a view to please and honour God, the practice of virtue is hereby greatly exalted; and a life, conducted upon such principles, is hallowed as one continued sacrifice to God. Besides, what is the love of God, but the love of spotless purity, of perfect wisdom, and righteousness, and goodness, joined in one matchless unchangeable character? Surely, therefore, the prevailing love of God, as it really is the love of holiness, righteousness, and goodness, must be attended with the practice of them, and with an aversion to every thing evil and immoral. For these reasons, our blessed Saviour and his apostles represent

SERM. the keeping of God's commandments as

II. the only good evidence of love to him :
 nay, the Apostle *John* tells us, it is the very thing itself ; * *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments ; and very justly ; for where there is a sincere obedience to the laws of God, there must be the love of purity, righteousness, and goodness ; and where men love these as such, assuredly they must love that Being, in whom they are in the highest possible perfection.*

Farther, the solemn worship of God, in acts of adoration, in prayer, and praises, are most natural expressions of the love of God, and earnestly recommended by the sacred writers. In the sixth chapter of St. *Matthew*, our Lord giveth us some most useful directions, with respect to prayer.

† *When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men : verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door behind thee, and pray unto thy Father, which is in secret ; and*

* 1 John v. 3.

† Matt. vi. 5—9.

*thy father, which seeth in secret, shall reward SERM.
thee openly. And when ye pray, use not vain*

II.

*repetitions as the heathen do; for they think
they shall be heard for their much speaking :
be not ye, therefore, like unto them ; for your
heavenly Father knoweth what ye have need
of, before you ask him. And, suitably to
these sentiments, he giveth his disciples a
pattern and form of prayer, consisting of
a few most comprehensive expressions,
which are natural and simple, and per-
fectly fit in an address to the Father of our
Spirits ; worthy, indeed, of him, who
came to teach the worship of God, in
spirit and in truth, and to deliver the
world from all the various vanity of super-
stition. But, as he well knew the useful-
ness of prayer, he therefore inculcath
that duty, and giveth the strongest assur-
ances, that our prayers, offered in the sin-
cerity of our hearts, shall be heard.
* *Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and
ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened
unto you : for every one, who asketh, re-
ceiveth ; and he, that seeketh, findeth ; and
to him, that knocks, it shall be opened.—If
ye then, being evil, know how to give good**

* Matt. vii. 7—12.

SERM. gifts unto your children, how much more will

II. *your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them, who ask him?* We find the sacred writers after him do much insist upon the same thing; exhorting us to pray always, * *to be instant in prayer, † to continue in the same with thanksgiving, ‡ and in all things, by prayer and supplication, to make our requests known to God.* But as to all pomp and pageantry in exercises of devotion, and every thing unworthy of the glorious perfections of that Being, to whom our prayers are addressed, this is intirely cut off; and we are taught to worship in the greatest simplicity.

The second great commandment, is, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. This our blessed Lord hath often inculcated; and sufficiently intimateth, that our good-will should extend to all; and that, whenever we have an opportunity of serving the interests of mankind, we should do it with chearfulness, accounting every man our neighbour. We are to love our neighbours as ourselves; and to do to others, as we would have

* Rom. xii. 12. † Coloss. iv. 2. ‡ Philip. iv. 6.

others

others to do to us ; that is, to pursue the SERM.

good and happiness of our neighbour, as II. }

the end, at which, in the honesty of disinterested affection, we aim ; and to make our own reasonable wishes and expectations the rules of our conduct towards others. And he exhorteth his disciples, to act with the greatest generosity and most liberal sentiments. * *If ye love them, that love you, what thanks have ye ? for sinners also love those, who love them : and if ye do good to them, who do good to you, what thanks have ye ? for sinners do also even the same. And if ye lend to them, from whom ye hope to receive, what thanks have ye ? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again ; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the highest ; for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil.* The loving of our enemies, that is, so far as there is any thing in their character lovely, and doing them justice in this respect, however they may have been injurious to us, and doing them good in return for bad offices, is the highest exercise of benevolence ; and

* Luke vi. 32—37.

SERM. this our Saviour exhorteth his disciples to

II. aspire after, as the most perfect resemblance of God. * *I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them, that curse you; do good to them, that hate you; and pray for them, that despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father, which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.* And we find, that our great Master requireth a disposition to forgive our enemies, as absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God, and to the obtaining the forgiveness of our own transgressions. † *If thou bringest thyself to the altar, and there rememberest, that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*—† *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive your trespasses; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.* And this he farther,

* Matt. v. 44.

† Ib. v. 23, 24.

† Ib. vi. 14, 15.

and

and most affectingly, illustrateth in the SERM.

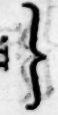
parable, *Matt. xviii. 23.* of a king, who, II. ~

upon the humble and earnest intreaty of a servant, who owed him ten thousand talents, moved with compassion, forgave him the debt; but afterwards, (upon the cruelty of that person to one of his fellow-servants, who owed him but an hundred pence, whom he, unmoved by any intreaties, cast into prison for it,) recalled his discharge of the debt, and insisted upon his paying the last farthing. *So, saith our Lord, shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye, from the heart, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* And, that the mind may be always liberally disposed and entertain kind sentiments of others, he commandeth, and warneth his disciples against, all rash judging and unjust censure; plainly intimating, that men of a censorious spirit, if they would look inward with impartiality, would find matter enough of self-accusation; possibly much more offensive than what they find in others. * *Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again: and why beboldest thou the mote,*

* *Matt. vii. 1—6.*

that

SERM. that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam, which is in thine own eye?

II.  or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

It is to be farther observed, that as we owe love and good-will to all, so there are certain relations in life, by which men are joined together in stricter bonds; and affections, suitable to them, are planted in the heart, which are warmer incentives to action: such are the relations of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, that of intimate friends, and the like. It is apparent, that there is great wisdom and goodness in endowing nature with these affections; for they contribute exceedingly to the enjoyment of social and domestic life; indeed, may be said to be the great source of that enjoyment; and are necessary to put men upon those labours, and reconcile them to those difficulties, which are always like to attend the present state of mankind and the exigencies of it. And as the objects of these affections

affections lie in a narrower circle, and in SERM.

II.

which, therefore, we have the better opportunity of serving the end of them, so they have a strength and delicacy, which would in many respects be inconvenient, were the objects of them as extended, as that of general good-will. Our blessed Lord, and his apostles, who taught what they received from him, have greatly encouraged men in the exercise of these affections, and have been very particular in their directions, with respect to various relations in domestic life. They shew the duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants; and have suggested sentiments, greatly tending to refine the social affections, and to make them pure and holy. Nor indeed can any thing be more unnatural, than industriously to check the exercise of those affections, or to indulge any selfish lust, whereby the generous tendency of them shall be counteracted. He must be a wretched creature in life, who is without natural affection, and is, by the Apostle *Paul*, reckoned amongst the very worst of men. But yet our blessed Saviour sheweth us, that as we are to deny ourselves, for conscience

SERM. conscience sake, to all selfish gratifications,

II. which are inconsistent with integrity of



character; so we are to lay restraints upon the natural social affections, and to act, as if not at all under any influence from them, when the cause of God demandeth it; and that all affections of this kind are to be subordinated to the great principles of piety, and to that goodness of heart, which always aimeth at the greatest good we are capable of doing. This is, no doubt, our Lord's meaning, when he teacheth us, that if any man ** cometh to him, and hateth not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and his own life also, he cannot be his disciple*. Men of generous minds and tender affections will acknowledge, that no instance of self-denial, in matters, which are intirely personal, is so hard and difficult as those, in which the social affections are to be thwarted and contradicted. Yet such self-denial, however painful and severe, our Lord requireth; and it is perfectly agreeable to reason and nature, that he should do so. Where the cause of God, where the public good demandeth it, all those affections, which

** Luke xiv. 26.*

which are intended to be subordinate to SERM.

II.

we are even to lay aside regard to the dearest relatives, so far, I mean, that it shall not be permitted to prevail to the neglecting of our duty, or violating the rights of conscience. We are then to act, as if father and mother, brothers, sisters, children, and intimate friends, were comparatively nothing in our esteem.

But as our Blessed Lord instructeth his disciples to exercise good-will to all, and to love even their enemies, and approveth and encourageth the more private social affections, of which near relations and intimate friends are the objects; so in the New Testament there is much notice taken of a new relation, of which he was the author, namely, the relation, in which his disciples stand to one another, as the members of his family, as the subjects of his kingdom, as joined together in one spirit, in the same business, and in serving the same purposes of life: which new relation furnished an additional argument for the exercise of charity; and there is not any thing more earnestly recommended by our Saviour, than that they should love
one

SERM. one another as his disciples. He would

II. have them peculiarly distinguished by mutual love. He insisteth upon it, as

his command to them, his *new commandment*, which he esteemed to be of the utmost importance; and he sets before them his love to them, as a pattern he would have them to follow. * *This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* In conforming themselves to this

pattern, love must be perfected in them. And his disciples, in declaring the duties of Christians, do likewise very earnestly recommend charity: indeed there is nothing so much inculcated, especially by the Apostles Paul and John, whose writings are full of it. In the circumstances, in which Christians found themselves after our Saviour's removal from them, such fervent love one to another, as it was very necessary to strengthen their cause and interests, so must it have ministered great comfort under the various difficulties and discouragements, in which they were in-

* John xv. 12, 13.

volved.

volved. But as we are to consider this law, SERM.
as what bindeth all Christians, at all times; II. }
so we must suppose, that the disciples of
Christ are recommended to such peculiar
love and esteem, on account of proportionable
worth and excellency of character. For no love or
esteem can be natural and rational, but what ariseth
from a sense of merit in the object; and therefore no love
can bind to superior love and esteem, but where there
is superior excellency. But where men are sincere
followers of our Saviour, there will be a foundation laid in
a divine temper, and life, for the greatest love to them. True Christians will be the most
excellent characters; intitled therefore to the greatest
regard. It is true worth, which is the closest and
most indissoluble cement of minds. This our Saviour hath
expressed in a manner worthy of him, and very
engaging; * *Whosoever doth the will of my Father,
which is in beaven, the same is my brother, sister,
and mother.*

Some other particulars, which are to be considered, shall be the subject of a distinct discourse.

* Matt. iii. 53.

S E R -

S E R M O N III.

Our Saviour's character, as a teacher
of morality.

MATTHEW vii. 28.

*For he taught them as one having
authority, and not as the Scribes.*

SERM. III. **I**N my last discourse, I proposed to make some general observations, which concern the whole of our duty, as it is laid before us in the New Testament ; and then to consider particularly some of the principal things, and which are most essential to a good life.

Under this last head of discourse, the love of God, the first and great commandment, and the love of our neighbour, which is the second in the importance of it, were principally to be considered and attended to, as what indeed comprehend

comprehend all our duties ; for these two SERM.

III.

must necessarily beget a most desirable spirit and temper, and prepare men for answering the purposes of human life, in the most effectual manner.

However, we find in the New Testament the particular social virtues, and those of private life, frequently and earnestly recommended, and the necessity of them as essential to the Christian character, plainly laid before us ; such are, humility, meekness, patience, sympathy and compassion, temperance, chastity, and contentment.

The first of these will be acknowledged to be exceedingly becoming in imperfect and guilty creatures, who are absolutely dependent upon the mercy and goodness of God ; and it is of the greatest use in human society. Pride and haughtiness of spirit are extremely offensive, and in many respects hurtful. Humanity, which is perfectly consistent with true greatness of mind, is, in itself lovely, and the fruits of it in society most desirable : Indeed, the undisturbed enjoyment of life doth, in a great measure, depend upon it ; and it is recommended and pressed by our blessed

Saviour,

K

SERM. Saviour, and his apostles, in a manner suitable to the importance of it. There is

III. nothing, which our Lord more carefully guardeth his servants against, than haughtiness, and a spirit of domination over one another; telling them, that he, who was great among them, should be their minister, and he, who was chief, should be as their servant; proposing his own example, who was meek and lowly in spirit, and who came to be among them as one that served; came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And on occasion of their contending about station in his kingdom, setting a little child in the midst of them, he letteth them know, that if they did not become as little children, and lay aside all these aspiring views, they should by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven.

* *But whosoever humbleth himself as this little child, the same shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* And it was a kind of proverbial speech with him, that he, who exalteth himself, shall be abased, and that he, who humbleth himself, shall be exalted. But that his disciples might never

* Matt. xviii. 4.

forget

forget this important lesson, he took an SERM. effectual method of riveting it in their III. minds, by stooping himself to one of the lowest offices in washing their feet; and and this a very little time before he was removed from them; at the same time, shewing them the meaning of this action in these expressive words, * *Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* Agreeably to this, the sacred writers exhort Christians to be cloathed with humanity, and to put on bowels of mercy, humbleness of mind, and long-suffering; and do themselves breathe the humblest spirit; particularly that apostle, who could truly say, he was not behind the very chiefest apostles. He was indeed superior to the rest, in gifts and endowments, and in his labours as a minister of Christ; yet he speaketh of himself with the deepest humility, and expresth the greatest abhorrence of all loftiness of spirit, and of all desire of dominion over others. To this

* John xiii. 13, 14, 15.

SERM. virtue, meekness of spirit, and that moderation, by which the wrathful passions

III.

are restrained, is nearly allied, and is a great and most useful ornament to human life ; recommended much by our Saviour, and of which he hath given us a noble pattern, according to what was prophesied concerning him, * *My servant shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man bear his voice in the streets ; a bruised reed shall be not break, and smoking flax shall be not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory.* † *He went as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.* Who, † *when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him, who judgeth righteously.*

The time would fail, in treating particularly of that tenderness of sympathy, patience of injury, contentment, and other virtues, which are earnestly recommended to the disciples of Christ, and which are in the sight of God of great price. Nor was it my design to treat particularly of

* Matt. xii. 19, 20. † Acts viii. 32. † 1 Pet. ii. 23.

them ;

them, and of the many advantages to human life, which flow from them; but only to bring them before your minds, as essential parts, and principal graces, of the Christian character; and to shew, how happily life must appear in its best form in the true Christian, in him, whose spirit is utterly abhorrent of all malice, envy, causeless wrath, and all dispositions to do evil; on the contrary, always engaged earnestly to do good.

But it ought to be very particularly observed, how often and warmly the disciples of Christ, (that the truly liberal and generous spirit may have its influence unrestrained,) are warned against covetousness; which, of all moral distempers, most contracteth the heart, and counteracteth all worthy affections. Our Lord, with great justice, teacheth, * *that a man's life doth not consist in the abundance, which he possesseth*: and he instructeth his disciples, *to take heed and beware of covetousness*; intimating, that it is apt to insinuate itself, and get possession of the heart, which it cannot fail of corrupting. This argument he hath very particularly insisted upon,

* Luke xii. 15.

SERM. Matt. vi. 19. *Lay not up for yourselves*

III. *treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust doth not corrupt, and thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also.*

A most just account this of the state of the mind, as corresponding to the apprehensions, which men have concerning their supreme good. If they place this good in earthly possessions, and look no higher, their hearts will be fixed to these; and all the powers will be engaged in the pursuit of them. But if, directed by reason, and nature, and the word of God, they pursue the true perfection of the human mind, which hath no connexion with earthly possessions, their hearts, raised above these, will be set upon far more excellent objects. But as the whole of life must necessarily take a tincture from that, which is fixed upon as the chief end of it, and as a man's steps must be directed according to his views and sense of things; so our Saviour, in the following verses, intimates the great importance of right judgments, of a just sense, with respect to the true

true ends of life, and of having the taste SERM.
accordingly formed. *The light of the body* III.

is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light : but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness ; and if the light, which is in thee, be darkness, how great is that darkness ? And farther goes on to shew, that, in this matter, there can be no compromise or composition. The heart cannot be both in heaven and upon earth ; set upon temporal possessions as the chief good, and yet, set upon things, which are, in their nature, not only different from, but opposite to, such possessions. *No man can serve two masters ; either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will cleave to the one and despise the other ; ye cannot serve God and mannan.* In a word, if men have their chief good in this world, and a taste accordingly debased, they can have no pretensions to the inheritance of the Saints in light, nor relish for the unspeakable blessings and advantages of it. Agreeably to this, he pronounceth them blessed, * *who are poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven* : and elsewhere, he inti-

* Matt. v. 3.

SERM. mateth, that riches, when they become

III. the objects of a man's trust and confidence, make it an impossible thing for him to be saved. * *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man, one who trusteth in riches, to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And the disciples of our

Lord speak in the same manner, exhorting men to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth; not to trust in uncertain riches, but to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, that so they may lay up to themselves a good treasure, and lay hold on eternal life; and that all Christians should act like stewards of the manifold goodness of God; as having received the gifts of the divine bounty in trust, which they ought to improve to the purposes of the great donor. Upon the whole, the true genius and spirit of Christianity is at utter enmity with all sordid and avaritious dispositions, and fixeth the heart upon spiritual and divine objects, in contempt of every thing temporal, when compared to them; disposing it liberally to lay out earthly treasures to serve the purposes of benevolence

* Matt. xix. 24.

and

and charity, and labouring to be rich in SERM.
those possessions, which are the treasures III.
of mind, and everlasting.

Lastly, purity from the pollutions of the flesh, temperance, and sobriety, are very frequently commanded to the disciples of Christ, as absolutely necessary to their obtaining the favour of God, and happiness.

* *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* This is a very different purity

from that of the ritual kind, in which the Pharisees boasted, *who made clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but were within full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* Our Lord sheweth, that the hearts and affections must be pure; otherwise men could not be accepted. † *Ye have heard, that it hath been said of them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* His disciple is not only to abstain from every bad action, but to make war upon every corrupt affection, till it is subdued. And in order to preserve the purity of his servants, he giveth a direction, which may appear severe, yet is necessary; namely,

* Matt. v. 8.

† Ib. 27.

if

SERM. if * thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and

III. cast it from thee; and if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee;

for it is profitable for thee, that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell: intimating, that to maintain our integrity, in a resolved and effectual manner, it is necessary, that any possession and enjoyment of life, (however in itself valuable as well as innocent,) which offendeth, that is, becometh a snare, and the occasion of falling into sin, (for this is the scriptural notion of offence,) should be given up for conscience-sake. So that men are to look upon purity of heart and life, as the most valuable possession; and to give up all, even the most desirable enjoyments, which come into competition with it. And as purity and integrity cannot be maintained without strict temperance and self-denial, so these virtues are often recommended; and it is to be considered, as the constant business of a Christian, to keep a strict watch over himself; and by all means, to maintain that self-government and discipline, which are necessary to the end, that

* Matt. v. 29, 30.

all desires and passions may be kept in continued subjection to conscience.

SERM.

III.

Now such is the morality, which is taught in the New Testament. I have only set the main lines of it before you ; but it is evident from them, that the Author of our Religion hath entered into the true spirit of morality ; and that a person, who is so happy as to observe his directions, will attain to the utmost perfection, which moral philosophy can aim at. Our blessed Saviour doth not indeed give us a system or body of statutes, or verbal laws ; nor descendeth into a minute directory of the particular actions of life. To give such a system, as would be sufficient to direct every individual in all his actions, and such as should be suited to all circumstances and incidents, is, in truth, utterly impossible. Whatever statutes might be given, and in- to however minute and particular a consideration of things the lawgiver might descend, yet still for the application of these laws to particular actions, and the circumstances of them, a great deal must be left to conscience and the sense of right and wrong. Without this latitude, no written law, suppose it ever so voluminous, would

SERM. would be a perfect guide, as will be evident to all, who have considered these

III.

matters. But our Saviour, as a teacher of morality, hath acted a much better part; which serveth the end far more effectually, and which speaketh him indeed a master in what he taught. He applieth himself to those powers, and principles, and affections, which God hath planted in the heart, as the springs of action, and to direct and guide it, which were perfectly known to him; such as the power of discerning things, which morally differ, the sense of good and evil, of excellent and vile, the admiration of the one and detestation of the other, which ever will be found in the heart of man, while any spiritual senses at all are exercised, the desire of happiness, and fear of suffering and misery, which are natural to all men. He insisteth upon the love of God, as the first and most important thing in morality and religion; and upon the love of our fellow-creatures, and a disposition to universal beneficence; to both which the heart and conscience of every man must instantly consent as right; and every man must see the importance and diffusive influence of it. He insisteth likewise,

wife, and the sacred writers after him, as SERM.
occasion offereth, upon the particular vir-

III.

tues, and duties of piety and charity, which are the fruits of these great principles in human life. And the particular social virtues are earnestly recommended, and those of temperance, moderation, and sobriety; as hath been already shewn: the great institution being to deliver nature from all prejudices and entanglements, arising from corrupt and irregular affections and habits; to deliver it from the domination of sinful lusts, and to prepare it for exerting the principles and powers, which are planted in it, in a proper manner; that so the sense of right and wrong, as the guide of life, the love of God and of mankind reigning in the heart, as the great commanding principles, and the particular virtues subordinate to these, such as faithfulness, meekness, humility, resignation, contentment, pity and tenderness, love to relatives, and the like, being exercised with proper strength in their proper places, an intire moral character may be formed, in which nature shall appear as it ought to be, and possessed of that, to which the moral powers manifestly tend, as its right state; namely,

SERM. namely, that blessed harmony of the soul,
III. which is the glory and happiness of man.

~ This state is that, which is expressed in the New Testament by such phrases as that of *being new creatures*, being *renewed in the spirit of the mind*, being *alive from the dead*, being *dead to sin and alive to righteousness*, and the like ; and standeth in opposition to that state of the mind, in which vile affections prevail, and men are dead in trespasses and sins, lost to all the great purposes of moral life. And when this intire character is once attained, and men are under the power of conscience, filled with the love of God, and of mankind, just and good, true and sincere, meek, humble, tenderhearted and compassionate, content, temperate, pure, and heavenly-minded ; then do they become, in truth, each a law to himself, with respect to the particular actions of life ; and in proportion as this divine temper prevaleth, will be careful to avoid evil and to do good ; and reason and conscience will be always at hand, to direct them in the application of general maxims to the various circumstances and incidents of life. And if a case should fall out, in which, (after the most ingenuous and diligent

gent inquiry, which they can make into what SERM.
is their duty and the will of God concerning III.

them) they should be in some measure at a loss; yet in acting to the best of their judgment, free from corrupt biases, no doubt, their sincerity will be accepted. So that our blessed Saviour, as a teacher of morality, hath taken the true method of advancing his disciples towards all that perfection of it, which our present state admitteth; and evidently appeareth, in his knowledge of human nature, to have unspeakably excelled all the philosophers, which went before him. And although his instructions will not make men philosophers, in the common acceptance of that word, (which was a thing far below his intentions) yet, when submitted to and observed in their behaviour, his instructions will infallibly raise human life to the utmost of what philosophy professed to aim at. And hence we may see the unreasonable-ness of an objection, which hath been laid against the Christian morality, as if it were defective, because some things, of great importance to a worthy and happy life, have not been at all recommended, or so much as mentioned; such, for instance, as

SERM. as friendship, and the love of our country ;

III. and the author of that objection might have

observed too, that there is no mention of the duty of a king, nor any directions given to princes and magistrates. But what doth all this amount to? Will not a good Christian love his country? Will not his religion give a great additional force to this particular virtuous affection, and prepare him, in the cause of his country, to act the most heroic part? Will not a good Christian be a worthy magistrate? Will he not be a tender and faithful friend? Will he not appear in the best manner in all the relations of life? Upon this, therefore, great stress ought to be laid, that the Christian morality tendeth to form an intire Character; and to raise nature to its noblest state; and that as it appeareth the divine Author had this in his view, so he pursued the true method of accomplishing it. And all this doth likely shew, that religion and morality, as our Saviour hath taught them, are things intirely personal. They have their seat in the heart. It is a divine temper and life, which rendereth men meet for the inheritance of the Saints in light; and which is necessary to their acceptance with

with God. Being of any party or deno-

SERM.

III.

mination, will not do; nor any thing merely ritual and external, or which any order of men hath it in their power to do for others. It is a new heart and a right spirit, which God requireth; and every man shall at the last bear his own burthen; and, as he soweth, so shall he also reap.

** He, who soweth to the flesh, shall, of the flesh, reap corruption; but he, who soweth to the spirit, shall, of the spirit, reap life everlasting.*

It may be added here, that, as the instructions of our Saviour in morality are adapted to all mankind, so they are wholly free from those vain imaginations, with which most of the philosophy of the ancients was mixed, and from all the absurd things, which priestcraft had devised. Every thing, which he requireth of his disciples, hath an evident tendency to serve the true purposes of morality, and to make human nature what it was intended to be. *His yoke is easy.* There is in his laws, and the duty, which he requireth of his servants, nothing superfluous; nor is there any thing wanting. If men practise his religion, they

* Gal. vi. 8.

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will

SERM. will be most reputable and useful members of society ; will adorn every station

III. } and relation in life ; and will be happy in the enjoyment of themselves. The best Christians will be the worthiest parents, and the most dutiful children ; the most affectionate husbands, and chaste and faithful wives ; the kindest masters, the most dutiful and obedient servants ; best princes, and most loyal subjects ; moderate and charitable in high stations, and in riches and wealth ; in adversity, patient and contented ; long suffering, and not easily provoked, but easily reconciled ; slow in resenting, ready to forgive ; hearty friends to all the world in the kindest wishes, and doing the best offices as they have opportunity. * *The wisdom, which is from above, is pure and peaccable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* And all, who are under the influence of it, will be sure to be guided safely to their supreme good. No matter though they are not capable of demonstrating from nature and the principles of reason, in a philosophical way, wherein the supreme good consisteth ;

* James iii. 17.

or though they cannot give a clear account SERM.
of the relations of moral objects, and the III. ~
connexion of true virtue with the highest
happiness; still if they be obedient to the
instructions of Christ, they will be safe;
and their faith in him, working by love
and all holy affections, will make them
meet for the inheritance of the Saints in
light.

Now to apply this short account of the
Christian morality to the main purpose of
this discourse, the Author of these Laws
and Instructions hath appeared in the
world in the character of a teacher sent of
God, and as having authority from him to
instruct and give laws to mankind. And is
there not great reason to believe him in
this? To shew, that there is, let it be con-
sidered, that it must be looked upon as a
great advantage to mankind, to have clear
directions in their duty given them as laws
from God, and under the sanction of his
authority. This, I think, will not be dis-
puted. Men, indeed, without any thing
external of this kind, may be sensible of
moral obligation; and persons of clear
understanding, who will attend and give
pains, may go a great length in the know-

SERM. ledge of their duty in the several relations

III. of life: their consciences, if justice be done to these sacred powers, will teach them a great deal. Still, must it not be greatly advantageous to the world, to be put under a discipline, which may be easily understood by all, comprehending all which is necessary to serve the purposes of morality and religion; and all this enforced by the interposition of express divine authority? So that even the simple and unlearned may not only fully understand what he is to do, that he may attain to a happy life, and what are the terms of his acceptance with God; but moreover is to act under this impression upon his mind, that this is revealed to him, as the law and will of his Maker, and that upon submitting to it dependeth his title to his Maker's favour; as his being rebellious against it will expose him to displeasure, and indignation, and dreadful punishment. No man surely will dispute it, that to have all this laid before men clearly, is a great advantage.

Now the Author of our Religion professeth, that he was the Son of God and sent of him, as for other purposes, so particularly,

particularly, to teach men their duty, and to SERM.

lead them in the way of salvation. And we III.

may see, that, as a teacher and law-giver, he hath acted his part like one, who thoroughly understood human nature and morality, as well as an ingenuous friend to mankind : that he hath delivered to the world a discipline, which fully answereth all the ends of moral discipline, and by which the obedient will be conducted to their supreme good. And that, in the whole of his instructions, he neither aims nor could aim at any thing, but to make his disciples worthy and happy. His spirit, in every instance, favoureth of simplicity and sincerity, and of the greatest goodness. And can any man seriously and soberly judge, that he was an impostor ! The purest and best and most perfect discipline delivered to the world, with the most excellent spirit, and the author an impostor ! A teacher, who excelleth all that ever were, and from whom we have all, which could be rationally expected from a teacher sent of God : and yet to be accounted of as one of the worst characters !

But let the supposition be made, that Christianity is an imposture; yet still let

SERM. men of ingenuity attend to the precepts of

III. it, (of which I have given a compendious account) and is there any one of them but what their consciences must approve?

If they mean to be good and worthy, must they not find themselves under a necessity of walking according to these precepts? Can they frame an idea of any thing more excellent than the true Christian spirit? And do not the instructions, which we have in the New Testament, concerning piety towards God, the almighty, infinitely wise and gracious Parent of the Universe, and the righteous Moral Governor of it, to whom we owe unreserved duty and obedience, and upon whom is all our dependence; concerning justice and good-will to mankind, and the exercise of all the social virtues; concerning purity of taste and manners, and freedom from the tyranny of lusts, and the evil spirit of this world; instructions, which convey the most liberal and generous sentiments, and form the spirit into the most excellent and divine temper: do not these instructions, I say, as soon as they are proposed and seriously attended to, enter deeply into the heart, and approve themselves to the conscience;

so

so that every man must see and be convinced, that if a teacher were really sent

III.

of God, he must deliver just such instructions? He must see, that if he will be a worthy and a good man, he must follow this course of life, and no other; and that no other can recommend him to his Maker, or answer the true ends of his being. He must therefore be determined to act according to the precepts of the gospel. And if he will not believe, that our Saviour was a teacher sent of God, his mind, one would think, must, in this respect, be in a state not a little unnatural. "I will, and

I must conform myself to the precepts of Christianity in all things; but I will not believe, that these precepts are laws of God, nor that the law-giver was sent by him; though, with all the strongest evidences of purity and integrity of spirit, which can be given in any such discipline, he assureth me, that he was so sent; and that what he teacheth is by divine authority."

I should most earnestly wish, that any, who do not believe revelation, would argue this point solemnly and seriously with their own hearts. Concerning the obligation to conform our lives and tempers to the dic-

SERM. tates of Christianity, there can be no ques-

III.

tion : conscience, in an ingenuous mind, must prevent all such debates : the only question is, whether this great teacher was sent of God, and cloathed with his authority, or not ? Now why should we not give credit to him, whom, as a teacher, we must embrace and submit to ? To say, that if we do what we ought to do, it is of no consequence, whether we believe him sent of God or not, is ridiculous ; for, if he be so sent, surely ingenuity will instantly suggest, that the greatest respect and regard is due to him under that character. And such an interposition in favour of mankind, in a most corrupt and degenerate state, is an expression of the goodness of God, which demandeth the utmost gratitude, on our part. Besides, that by believing in our Saviour, and embracing as truth, what he hath taught us concerning himself; the part, which he acted on earth, the part, which he now acteth in heaven, and which he will act at the great day ; the promises, which he hath given us, and the revelations, which he hath made ; we are furnished with some very strong motives to obedience, and which are admirably fitted

to

to work upon the ingenuity of the heart. SERM.

III.

So that it is of the greatest consequence to us, that we believe him sent of the Father.

And if it be so, then it becometh us, with great diligence, to inquire into the evidences of this, and to settle the point in our own minds. Let any man of common candour try, whether he can bring the ideas of our Saviour's character and that of an impostor and deceiver, to accord in his mind. Or whether any thing should prevent his giving credit to our Saviour's testimony concerning himself, but an apparent impossibility, that the Supreme Being should give any person such a commission, or cloath him with such authority? And surely, no man will pretend to demonstrate such an impossibility.

When a person peruseth the laws of Christianity with attention, and considereth the tendency of them, and those ends of life, which this religion hath clearly set before him, he cannot but conceive a very favourable opinion of the Author of it. But when he hath actually given himself up to this discipline, and conscientiously endeavoureth to conform himself to the laws of Christ, and, by the assistance of God's

SERM. God's good spirit, with success, that the true Christian temper obtaineth in him,

III.

and that the ends of those good laws are in some good measure answered ; it is not possible, but that the mind should find ease and satisfaction. A man, reflecting seriously, findeth himself in that state, which it is the declared purpose of all moral discipline to serve. True and sincere, though imperfect, piety, purity, goodness, and all worthy affections prevailing in him, and, according to the condescending and gracious terms of salvation declared in the gospel, the most pleasing and comfortable hopes attending them, all these place him in a state, in which true excellency consisteth, and from which the purest and most stable self-enjoyment must flow. When he hath examined this state of his mind with the greatest attention, and in the most cool and deliberate temper, this must appear to his reflecting thoughts undoubted truth. It is not a vain enthusiastic imagination, which, having got the better of sound sense and reason, createth to him a chimerical paradise : but if there be any foundation for morality at all, if there be a right and a wrong, a good and an evil ; if there be any

any difference between what is true, and SERM.
pure, and lovely, and the contrary ; if there III.

be a sovereign moral ruler, who attendeth to our actions, and will interpose to reward and punish, according to the moral quality of them ; if there be, in fine, such a thing as moral excellency, at which we ought to aim as the highest attainment ; then surely he must be right in his conduct and state, and therefore must be happy. Nor can he devise any thing to make him more perfect and happy, than a patient continuance in that course of life and action, which Christianity hath marked out to him ; but may say to himself with the utmost assurance, that he cannot err, that he cannot be in delusion, in embracing and pursuing the tendency of this religion. And as, in believing, that it is of divine authority, he strengtheneth his own sense of obligation to obey the laws of it, and addeth greatly to his own comfort ; so this will and must be a strong inducement to him to believe, if he can see good reason to believe ; and having found this in the direct proofs and evidences, that Christ was sent of God, he will rest satisfied. But indeed from that very temper and state
of

SERM. of mind, which Christianity produceth in
 III. him, a strong presumption in favour of the
 author of it is unavoidably suggested; and
 hard it will be for him to persuade himself,
 that the person, to whom he oweth
 this discipline, was an impostor.

Let it be farther observed, with what an
 honest negligence, a person, in this state
 of mind, must bear objections raised against
 Christianity, taken only from little circumstances;
 or things not material to the great
 design of it, of which men given to dis-
 putation may seem to make a great deal.
 The sense of what it hath produced, and
 the presumption in its favour arising from
 that, will not be overcome by such ob-
 jections. Truth, indeed, by a candid mind
 will always be embraced, and no valuable
 interest will ever suffer by it. So that if
 the evidences of the truth and divine au-
 thority of the Christian religion could be
 clearly overthrown, an honest and fair
 mind must then give it up: but when
 there is such strong proof, that Christ was
 sent of God; objections raised, at such a
 distance of time from the great facts, or
 taken, perhaps, from some things not at
 all essential to the religion of Christ, which
 are

are hard to be understood, however by men SERM.
of subtle minds plausibly urged, will very III.
little avail. And he, who, being a sincere
believer, hath, as the Apostle *John* speaketh, *the witness in himself*, will not find
reason to be greatly moved by them.

Nothing can be more natural, than for
a believer to reason after this manner, with
a person, who would persuade him to renounce Christianity—What is it you would
have me to do? Would you have me
to cease to love my Maker, to adore and
worship, to serve and obey, and in all
things to submit myself to him? Or
would you have me to cease to love my
neighbour, to be benevolent, generous, and
liberal, tender-hearted, just, and faithful?
Would you have me to give up purity,
charity, temperance, moderation, and all
the discipline of the mind, which I see is
necessary to make me what I ought to be?
Would you have me not to pursue, what
I clearly perceive to be the very end of my
being? and to desert a state the most honourable,
worthy, and happy, which human nature
can be in? Surely, this cannot be your
meaning. Now, if I am to be a worthy,
an honest and a good man, I must

SERM. must still conduct life, as I have hitherto

III. done, under the influence of the Christian

faith, profess what I will. What is it then you require? That I should no longer believe, that Jesus Christ was sent of God; or had any authority to give these laws, which are contained in the New Testament? But if I am certainly to obey these laws, whether I believe the author of them was so sent or not, my believing, that he was sent of God, which must naturally engage me to be more observant of my duty, will be a real advantage to me. At the same time, I see I have all the reason in the world to believe, that the author of these laws did not intend to impose upon mankind in any instance; and as he claimeth regard and submission, as being sent by the Father, so the discipline, which he hath taught, and delivered to the world, is perfectly worthy of a person in such a character, and of one clothed with divine authority: so that I cannot but be disposed to give him credit. Such wisdom, such purity, such just and sublime representations of the ends of human life, and of what is laid up for the righteous, such grace to mankind, such terms of acceptance

as our Saviour hath declared, such an ab-SERM.

stractedness from the world, and indepen- III.

dance on all things temporal, as he hath shewed, and which he taught all his disciples,—these surely have nothing in them, which favoureth of impossure. If we shall suppose the most friendly and upright mind to have really descended from heaven, to be the teacher of mankind, he must on the whole have taught as our Saviour did. And why should I not receive his testimony, the receiving of which can, in no respect, obstruct, but greatly aideth me in my progress towards that perfection, which is my highest aim in life? If all this should be looked upon as no more than presumption, yet it will be acknowledged to be a strong presumption; and in which the mind may rest perfectly secure against suffering by it in any respect.

I shall conclude this discourse with one very natural inference from what hath been said, and which may be very properly addressed to believers; namely, that one way to become established in the Christian faith is to be diligent in the practice of Christianity; to give the greatest pains in subduing all irregular affections, and in cultivating

SERM. cultivating those, which are good and worthy ; in doing good, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

The purer the heart and the life are, the more discerning the moral eye will be. And as corrupt affections bribe and bias the understanding, and pervert the judgment ; so purity and goodness of heart prepare the mind for acting its part with impartiality, and for judging aright. But what is principally to my purpose is, that men, who conform their tempers and actions to the precepts of Christianity, and attain to the holy and divine life, must have, in themselves, a witness to the happy tendencies, blessed effects, and to the importance of that religion ; a witness, which other men have not. They must be sensible, that they are in a right state, and enjoy human nature and human life in the best manner. And surely, nothing will more contribute to establish the mind in believing, than this. The direct evidences of the truth and divine authority of the religion of Jesus, from prophecies and miracles, are strong and convincing to the judgment : but it is the experimental sense of what that reli-

gion

gion is, and what it produceth, which SERM.
filleth the mind with peace and joy in be-

III.

lieving. That we may therefore be firm
believers, and hold fast our confidence, let
us endeavour to be sincere and eminent in
the Christian practice.

M SER.

S E R M O N IV.

Observations upon our Saviour's last
discourses with his disciples.

JOHN XIV. I.

*Let not your heart be troubled ; you
believe in God, believe also in me.*

SERM.
IV.

NOTHING can be more engaging to the attentive reader, than the light, in which our blessed Saviour appeareth in these his last discourses to his disciples, and in his prayer to the Father for them. Our Lord knowing, that the time of his passion drew near, and that he must quickly leave his disciples, setteth himself in the most friendly manner, to comfort them under their apprehensions of the loss, which they should sustain by his absence, and to fortify their minds against the difficulties

faculties, which they were like to meet with, SERM.
in acting the part, to which he had called IV.

them; and accordingly in perusing these discourses, we shall see a greatness of mind, which did indeed become the Son of God, in conjunction with the utmost tenderness of affection; the surest and noblest foundation laid for the comfort of his disciples; and addressed to them in the most engaging manner. After I have represented these things particularly, I shall make some reflections upon them; chiefly with a view of shewing, that these discourses of our Lord, and his prayer at the conclusion of them, bear the plain marks of being genuine; and that therefore they furnish a strong presumptive argument for the truth of our holy religion.

Our blessed Lord doth not at all attempt to lessen the apprehensions of his disciples, concerning the sufferings, which they were to meet with, when he should be removed from them. He tells them plainly, that the world would hate them. * *If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are*

* John xv. 18.

SERM. not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

IV.

Again, * These things have I spoken to you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogue; yea the time cometh, that he, that killeth you, shall think, that he doth God good service; as he had told them upon another occasion, that they should † be betrayed, both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death; and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. And, ‡ before all these things, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and to prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. A prospect, it must be owned, frightful enough; and to which the event was agreeable. But I say, he doth not attempt to lessen their apprehensions of these sufferings; nay, with the greatest candour, lays open the future scene. Thus they had a fair opportunity of counting the cost, as he adviseth all his disciples to do; that so, if they were not satisfied to continue in his service at such expence of suffering, they might in time lay aside the character of his

* John xvi. 1. † Luke xxi. 16. ‡ Ib. xxi. 12.

disciples,

disciples, and take care of those interests, SERM.
IV. }
which they should think fit to prefer to his
cause and friendship.

Yet whatever difficulties and sufferings
their constancy in his service might lay
them under, he proposeth to them such
considerations, as were sufficient to make
their minds quite easy, and even joyful in
the prospect.

He giveth them assurance, that, in an
honest discharge of their duty to him, they
should be beloved of his Heavenly Father,
who would ever countenance and assist
them. * *If a man love me, he will keep
my words, and my Father will love him, and
we will come unto him, and make our abode
with him.—† At that day ye shall ask in my
name, and I say unto you, that I will pray the
Father for you, because ye have loved me, and
believed, that I came out from God. The love
of the father must ever give the strongest
consolation. When men have just con-
ceptions of the Supreme Being, of his in-
finite power, and wisdom, and goodness,
and know, that they are the objects of his
favour, this must beget a magnanimity and
gladness of heart, which will make a per-*

* John xiv. 23. † Ib. xvi. 26.

SERM. son even easy and happy under any persecutions from mankind. To be brought

IV.

before human tribunals, before the greatest personages and the most awful, to be treated as a criminal, to be condemned and sentenced to death, will not greatly move a person, who knoweth, that the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth is his friend; to whom, our Saviour assureth his disciples, they should have ready access; and that what was fit for themselves, and might be serviceable to the cause, in which they were engaged, they should never ask in vain.

And he leaveth them for their comfort, in the most affectionate manner, his own peace and blessing. * *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you: let not your hearts be troubled, neither be ye afraid: My peace, to whom the Father hath intrusted all power and authority. Agreeably to this, he saith, in the words of my text, Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.* Such express personal declarations from the Son of God, clothed with such authority, must very

* John xiv. 27.

fully

fully have satisfied the disciples, who believed on him, and who might rest assured, that what he promised should be fully accomplished. SERM.
IV.

Farther, he intimateth, that it was high honour and dignity put upon them, and the greatest testimony of his affection, that they were called to such service. * *Ye have not chosen me, but I have ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth much fruit, and that your fruit should remain.* Much fruit, in the conversion of the world to the Christian faith, and in directing mankind into the way of salvation. And in his prayer, *John xvii. 18. As thou hast sent me into the world, so have I sent them into the world,* to serve the same purpose, and in support of the same cause; in which station and business they became the most distinguished instruments of divine beneficence to mankind, and did in the most substantial manner glorify God. The apostles probably, at this time, were not fully sensible of the high honour, with which our Lord distinguished them; but when they did come to be sensible of it, it must have been to them matter of great

* John xv. 16.

SERM. joy. They found themselves raised to a

IV. state of importance and significance unequalled in this world; as, in it, they were employed in doing the greatest possible service to mankind; and their names will be recorded to the end of time with honour.

Again, our Lord argueth with them, that they had no reason to think it strange, that they should meet with ill usage, in the world, or to complain much of it, seeing they could suffer no worse usage, than he, their master, suffered. * *If the world hated you, ye know it hated me before it hated you. — Remember the word, that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than the Lord: if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my sayings, they will keep yours also. — † If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they call them of his housebold. How insignificant must they, indeed, have accounted their own sufferings, when they considered what the Son of God endured? and how honourable must they have accounted that suffering state, in which they had fellowship with him? To this it may be added, that they suffered in the cause of him, who*

* John xv. 18.

† Matt. x. 25.

loved

loved them, and gave himself for them; SERM.

IV

and surely greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend; a just sence of which must beget the utmost gratitude, and have the same effect upon all sincere believers, which it had upon the Apostle Paul, who says,

** The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all once dead; and that he died for all, that they, who live, should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him, who died for them and rose again. Who then, that believed in Christ, and had a just sence of such love, could decline labour, could decline suffering, for his name's sake, and in his cause?*

Our Blessed Saviour likewise promiseth to his disciples, that, upon his removal from them, he would send the Holy Comforter to be with them, who should abundantly compensate the loss, which they sustained by his absence; and, indeed, make it profitable to them. † *Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you, that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come, but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And he giveth a particular*

* Cor. v. 14.

† John xvi. 7.

SERM. account of the province assigned to this

IV. Comforter or Advocate, and the great part, which he should act ; that, with respect to

the apostles, the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father would send in his name, should lead them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them. By this means, they would be most happily furnished for acting their part with honour and success. Agreeably to this, he saith upon another occasion, *And when you are brought before kings and magistrates for my sake, take no thought how or what ye shall speak ; for it shall be given you in the same hour, what ye shall speak : for it is not ye, that speak, but the spirit of your Father, that speaketh in you.* And he promiseth, that he would give them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries should not be able to gain-say or resist. And with respect to the world, he informeth them, that this Advocate would convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. *Of sin, because they believe not on me ; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more ; of judgment, because the Prince of this World is judged.* Which way of speaking,

ing, some interpreters think, alludeth to *SERM.*

IV.

the *Jewish* courts, and denoted by peculiar names: but whatever may be in that, the general sense and design of the words seem to be this, that after the effusion of the Holy Ghost, and conferring of miraculous powers upon the apostles, the world should have have most abundant evidence, that our Blessed Saviour was really the person he professed himself to be, the Son of God and the Saviour of the World; and that they should appear very guilty, who rejected him: that his righteousness should be abundantly vindicated, when he was declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead, and ascending to the Father's right hand; and that, by the prevalence of his gospel against the kingdom of darkness, it should be evident to the world, that there was a power in him to judge and cast out the prince of it.

Lastly, he proposeth a great reward for their services and sufferings. *Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me: in my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.*

SERM. you. *I go to prepare a place for you; and if*

IV. *I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.* This is a matter, of which, in many other passages, our Saviour very particularly speaketh, giving his disciples the strongest assurances, that, whatever they might suffer in this world, they should be happy in the world to come.

And having discoursed at great length upon these topics, he concludes with recommending himself and them to his Heavenly Father, in that solemn address, which we have in the seventeenth chapter of this gospel.

I shall now make some observations upon these discourses of our Saviour, and on his prayer; to shew, that they bear the plainest marks of being genuine, and so furnish a strong presumptive argument of the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion.

Let it be observed, that these discourses, and our Lord's prayer at the conclusion of them, are perfectly in character. In the first place, they speak a sense of personal dignity, which became such a person, and could

could become no other. *Ye believe in God, SERM.*

believe also in me.— I am the way, the*

truth and the life.—† He, that hath seen me,

hath seen the Father.—Believest thou not, that

I am in the Father and the Father in me?

And how many expressions, to the same purpose, have we in this prayer? As our Lord was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separated from sinners; so in his solemn address, he speaketh in a manner, which became such a character. Here are no

confessions of error or fault; no melancholy reflections upon defects in his obedience; no such thing as a sense of moral infirmity; no asking of assistance, as conscious of a weakness, which was unequal to the duty incumbent upon him; but a perfect character maintained in all the dignity of it. He speaketh as having fully answered the Father's design in that the most important of all parts, which he was called to act; and agreeably to a character perfectly good and unspotted, he addresseth himself to the Father with a most assured mind, and most steady confidence. † *I have glorified thee on earth, I*

* John xiv. 16.

† Ib. xiv. 8.

† Ib. xiv. 4.

have

SERM. have finished the work, which thou gavest me

IV. to do; and now, O Father, glorify me with the glory, which I had with thee before the world was. But not only doth he address the Father with assured confidence, but in strains, which, in any other person, would have been impious, as well as unnatural. He speaketh of a glory, which he had with the Father before the world was. * And as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him—and this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.—† All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.—‡ As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.—|| Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, who shall believe in me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.—§ Father, I will, that they also may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

* John xvii. 2. † Ib. 10. ‡ Ib. 18. || Ib. 20.
§ Ib. 24.

Such

Such language as this could not be fit for SERM.

IV.

any man, nor for any angel. It is not necessary to my present argument, that the sense of every of these phrases, and of such others, should be precisely ascertained: Very probably no one could know the full meaning of some of them, but he, who spake in this manner. What is to my purpose in them, is plain enough; that our Blessed Saviour, in this address, assumeth to himself a dignity of station and character, and a relation to the Father, which were peculiar to himself; and yet perfectly consistent with the greatest deference to the Father, by whom he was sent, whose work he had finished, and with whom, and by whose gift, he had glory; which deference appeareth in the whole manner of his address, and the particular expressions he every where useth.

Now if we must, for argument's sake, make the supposition, that these discourses and this prayer are all fiction and imposture, there are but two cases, which, upon this supposition, can possibly be put; namely, that these were indeed the words of *Jesus Christ*, but that he was an impostor, and assumed a character, to which he had no just

SERM. just pretensions; or else, that *Jesus Christ*
 IV. did not at all speak such things; but that
 the writer of this gospel feigned them, with
 an intention of putting them upon the world
 as his.

As to the first, that *Jesus Christ* did really
 say these things, which are here recorded,
 but that he was an impostor, and assumed
 a dignity of station and character, to which
 he had no pretensions; let it be considered,
 to what purpose in the world imposture
 could create such peculiar dignity, and utter
 such sentiments. Indeed a person, who
 pretended to be the Messiah of the *Jews*,
 must pretend to very high dignity: but his
 claiming such a station and character did
 not make it necessary for him to assume to
 himself, what *Jesus Christ* assumeth; nor
 did it necessarily lead him to such senti-
 ments, as *Jesus* here uttereth. A deceiver,
 who had private purposes to serve, might
 be well supposed to declare, that he acted
 by divine authority and commission: this
 might be necessary to his purpose; but then
 this was sufficient to his purpose. And if
 he could persuade the world to believe,
 that he was sent of God, his end was as
 effectually served as it could be served.


To

To what purpose is he to go quite out of, SERM.
and above nature; to frame a character so IV.

extraordinary, and for that very reason questionable, when all, that he could have in view, might be as well attained without it? It may well be expected, that a person of great and deep design, but of a bad heart, would take the most natural way of serving his own ends; and that he would not load his scheme with things extraordinary and quite beyond nature, if they were not necessary to his design. And certainly, if our Lord meant to impose upon the world, and serve only a vile interest of his own, there was no necessity for his claiming such a dignity of station and character, and such a peculiar relation to the Father, as he here assumeth; no necessity for speaking of a glory, which he had with the Father before the world was; no occasion for such expressions as these, *all mine are thine, and thine are mine; all things, that the Father hath, are mine; nor for his speaking of being in the Father, and the Father in him.* These are sentiments, which, upon supposition of his being an impostor, would have no necessary connexion with his design. This would have been sufficiently answered, if he could only have persuaded the world,

N
that

SERM. that he had authority from God. Nay, in

IV.  truth, such a way of speaking had a great tendency to defeat his design; as it must make the attentive and thinking much more inquisitive before they gave credit to pretensions so extraordinary; and determine them to give no credit at all, but upon the fullest and clearest evidence. The world might be more easily persuaded to receive and submit to a person, who pretended to no more than his being endowed with extraordinary powers and authority, than to one, who declared himself the only begotten Son of God, existing with the Father before the world was; who said, *he was in the Father and the Father in him, and that the Father and he were one*; thus giving occasion to his adversaries to say he blasphemed, in that he being a man made himself God. An impostor, who pretended to all this, must only incurber his own scheme, and make the reception of it in the world the more difficult.

Again, if Jesus Christ was an impostor, and did not stand in that relation to the Father, to which he pretended, there was not only the spirit of deceit in him, but the most insolent impiety, which can well

show and beholding what who himself be

be imagined. Let us seriously attend to SERM. this. He doth not only assume innocence

IV.

without stain, and righteousness without defect, which are things quite above our nature in the present state of it; but in a solemn address to God, and which, as far as the present argument is concerned, may be called an appeal to him, says, that he had being and glory with him before the world was; that he had received power from him over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as God had given him; and that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world. I doubt not to say, that such strains as these, upon the supposition of an imposture, are most impious. No wonder the *Jews*, who believed not on him, charged him with blasphemy, and making himself equal with God. Who, amongst mortals, would have dared so to address himself to the Most High, the Possessor of Heaven and Earth, as our Saviour hath done, who was not lost to all sense of fear and religious reverence? Not only speaking what, upon the present supposition, was not true, but bringing the Deity himself in to support the imposture, and boldly hazarding an

SERM. appeal to him; for such indeed this address may be accounted. In a word, such

IV. language, if it did not express the sentiments of the heart, and the very truth, must be most insolently blasphemous, as well as most absurd. But let me obtest the adversaries of the Christian faith to consider, whether there is any thing in our Saviour's life, and doctrine, which would lead them into a supposition of his being a person of such an utterly abandoned character? Is not his doctrine, are not his precepts, such, as have the best tendency to promote true religion, and the moral perfection and happiness of mankind? Are there not the greatest appearances of simplicity, and of an intention to do good? And how can we bring these and the most daring and profane impiety to consist together? Surely, he himself believed what he was saying to the Father; and really had in his mind the sentiments, which are uttered in his address. As the prayer itself hath nothing of the air of fiction, so the ingenuity and integrity of the character in general convinceth us, that our Lord spake what was true.

But

But let the second case be considered; SERM.

IV.

namely, that Jesus Christ did not offer up any such prayer to the Father; but that the author of this gospel composed it, and the discourses, of which we have been speaking, with an intention of putting them upon the world as the words of Christ: and it will certainly appear, that this writer doth not seem to be a person fit for contriving, and executing, such a design as this. His writings shew the greatest simplicity of spirit; and, I think, we may be very confident, that his own genius could never have furnished such a character as that of our Saviour; such a station; such a relation to the Father of the Universe; and a spirit, and sentiments, so suitable to them. And if he was capable of such a fiction, to what purpose was it? Not at all to serve any worldly ends. And what other could be supposed? If his design really was what he himself declared; namely, that men might be persuaded to believe on the name of the Son of God, and believing might have everlasting life; then the honest generosity and goodness of his heart bringeth us back to a persuasion of candour and simplicity in him, and disposeth the mind

SERM. to receive his testimony. And the contrary supposition, that he was the author of such a fable, and meant to impose it upon the world, is liable to the same objections, and laboureth under the same absurdities, which have been taken notice of in the former case. If *John* had been an impostor, and laboured to propagate a fiction, it cannot be imagined, that he would have loaded and incumbered it with circumstances, so much out of the usual course of nature, and with sentiments, so intirely above it; which must greatly tend to obstruct his design, and which a very small measure of understanding would convince any man was enough to defeat it.

Secondly, in conjunction with this sense of personal dignity, these discourses of our Saviour, and his prayer, discover the greatest goodness and benevolence, and contain the most tender and friendly sentiments. They are introduced with a very significant expression of our Lord's being disposed to condescend to the very lowest offices for the good of his servants, I mean his washing the feet of his disciples; a service usually performed by those of the lowest station. And he tells them, he did this,

that he might set them an example of that SERM. goodness, which will stoop to any office, IV.

by which we may be serviceable to our brethren. If I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. But these discourses, as was said, are full of affection and the tenderest concern for his disciples. Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me: In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also.—Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you: let not your heart be troubled, neither be you afraid.—* Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your hearts; nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. † In the world, ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the

* John xvi. 6. † Ib. 33.

SERM. world. But we see this tender concern

IV. *which, indeed, he speaketh as one, who had almost forgot his own circumstances, and was attentive only to the interest of his friends. With what earnestness doth he, over and over, commend them to his Heavenly Father, as persons, who were not of this world, and had no reason to expect any friendship or assistance from it; as persons, whom he had sent into the world, in pursuance of the Father's giving them to him; persons, whom he had taken pains to instruct and prepare for the services, to which they were called; praying, that they might be under the Father's care and protection, that they might be kept from evil, that they might be sanctified by the truth, and that they might be united to the Father and him, and to one another; meaning, no doubt, that they should be joined together in one spirit, in pure and fervent love! And how pathetic the conclusion of his prayer! * O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known, that thou hast sent me: and I have declared unto*

John xvii. 25.

them

*them thy name, and will declare it; that SERM.
the love, wherewith thou hast loved me, may*

IV.

*be in them, and I in them. And as he prays
for them, so he prays for all, who should
believe in him through their word, that
they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in
me and I in thee; that they also may be one in
us, that the world may believe, that thou hast
sent me.*

To these things let us add the consideration of the nature of that support and consolation, which our Lord proposed to his servants; and we shall see, that they perfectly became one, whose kingdom was not of this world, and whose happiness did not lie in it. He layeth before them ingenuously the sufferings, which he foresaw they must undergo in his service; but comforteth them, from an assurance of the Father's love; the worth of the cause, in which they were engaged; the dignity of their station; the certainty of their success; and the greatness of their reward in heaven. No attempt to betray them into any hope of prosperity in this world; or to delude them with prospects agreeable to flesh and blood. What is aimed at, is to raise their views quite above every thing of this kind; to

SERM. to lead them to springs of comfort, and joy,

IV. which are utterly independent of the world; to beget in them the most generous sentiments, and that true fortitude of spirit, which is the constant fruit of a just sense of the excellency of true religion, and of the favour of God, which will always follow it; of the pure joy, which is annexed to it, and that eternal happiness, which shall crown it. To comfort and encourage his disciples, in this manner, was perfectly in character; and became one, who was not of this world, and who could not look upon any man as a disciple of his, in whom the spirit of it prevailed. And now, how little was all this like imposture, or a disposition to deceive? How far from the arts, which one, who had an intention to impose upon mankind, could practise? Nothing is proposed, which the children of this world account substantial; nothing in hand: on the contrary, scenes of persecution and suffering laid before them; and they are to have their great reward in the world to come.

In the next place, let us attend to the stress, which our Blessed Saviour lays, in these discourses, upon the coming of that Comforter,

Comforter, or Advocate, whom he would SERM.
send from the Father to abide with his dis-

IV.

ciples; and by whom they should be so furnished, and instructed, that they should find they were no losers by our Saviour's absence, but gainers rather. His intention plainly was to fix his disciples in the resolution of adhering to him, as their leader; and of doing their utmost to propagate his religion, and to support his cause; and in order to this, amongst many other considerations suggested to them, he giveth them assurance, that, after his death, they should have such aid from heaven, by means of the Comforter, that they should find themselves, in all respects, equal to the work, to which they were called. Now, had our Saviour acted the part of an impostor, and intended to deceive them, it shewed the greatest weakness and folly to take this method; for as soon as his servants should find themselves disappointed in their expectations of this extraordinary assistance, upon which he had taught them to depend, they would be determined to forsake his cause inirely, as being altogether imposed upon by him. As the coming of that Blessed Advocate to their assistance, according

SERM. cording to his promise, must greatly establish them in the faith; so, had he not come, they must have seen, that his promise was vain; and, consequently, the method, which our Saviour took, in this instance, to confirm them in their loyalty to him, and to strengthen their resolutions of supporting his cause, was the most direct method, upon supposition of his being an impostor, to make them renounce both.

Lastly, let us consider the circumstances of our Saviour, when he thus discoursed with his disciples, and thus prayed for them. He was in a few days to leave the world, and to be put to death as a malefactor. He had intimated this himself, and accordingly it came to pass. In expectation of this event, he thus laboureth to establish his disciples in their faith in him as the Messiah, and lays before them, upon supposition of his speaking truth, the most weighty considerations. But, if he was an impostor, to what end was all this labour bestowed? What was it to him, when dead and gone, what these men did, or what became of them? What would it avail, whether they cleaved to, or renounced him? No man can imagine, that

he could have any thing in view, if it was SERM. 2.
not, at the expence of deluding a few IV. 11
weak men, to keep up the memory of a
high character, in the prospect of which,
present vanity may be supposed to have
been gratified. If unbelief will say, this
was the view, it must, at the same time,
acknowledge, that there was not the least
rational prospect of succeeding. A dozen
of poor illiterate persons of no name, in-
terest, or significance in the world, with-
out one single person of power to stand by
them, are to keep alive the memory, and
support the pretensions, of a person, who
wanted to impose upon all the world, and
who was prosecuted as a criminal, con-
demned, and crucified ! Might he not
plainly see, that their attempts would be
vain ; that, as they had all the world against
them, they would be quickly baffled and
crushed ; and that, when they had nothing
left them but the reputation of his name,
which the world had loaded with infamy,
they would be able to make nothing of the
cause ? Surely, the best degree of understand-
ing must have convinced him of this ; and
made him lay aside all hopes, that his pre-
tensions would survive himself.

Thus

SERM. Thus I have endeavoured to shew the

IV. manifold absurdities, which must follow the imagination, that these discourses of our Saviour are not genuine; or that he was an impostor. So that we cannot help concluding, that he really so spake to his disciples, and that he spake the truth. And any man, who will consider these discourses with an impartial mind, must see, that they are so much in character, so worthy of him, and breathe such a spirit, that, while they greatly please, they, at the same time, furnish a strong argument for the truth and divine authority of our holy religion.

But particularly, with respect to our Blessed Saviour's address to the Father, it must be pleasing to view such a picture, if I may so call it, of him, who was the image of the invisible God, set before us: Of such a person, upon the most solemn of all occasions, praying to the Father, and uttering sentiments, which were worthy of spotless purity; of the highest dignity, and a peculiar relation to the Father as his only-begotten and well-beloved son; of benevolence in all its extent; of the tenderest affections; and of the greatest and most elevated views. How doth the heart exult
to

to find in human nature a person of such a SERM.
character ! The Son of Man justly as- IV.

suming what none of the angelic orders could, by any means, pretend to ! How amazing the goodness of the Father, who sent his Son, in this manner, to seek and save that, which was lost ! Very affecting must a just sense of the infirmity of nature, and of the manifold disadvantages of our present state, be to every person, who hath eyes to see and a heart to consider. But when we turn our thoughts to the state, to which our Blessed Saviour came to raise mankind, the very greatest sentiments, the largest and most comfortable hopes, spring up in the mind. Provision is made for the faithful servants of Christ, that they shall be where he is, that they shall be like him ; and he, who was pleased to take human nature upon him, in all its sinless infirmities, and stooped to such a relation to mortals, being in all things made like unto his brethren, shall one day exalt them into the highest glory, and crown them with most perfect bliss. Bearing this near relation to the Son of God, therefore, and having such hopes, let every one think highly of himself ; not with that elation
of

S E R M O N V.

The character and life of the Apostle
Paul.

ACTS XX. 24.

*But none of these things move me,
neither account I my life dear un-
to myself, so that I might finish
to my course with joy, and the mi-
nisty, which I have received of
the Lord Jesus, to testify the gos-
pel of the grace of God.*

IN pursuance of my design to lay be-SERM.

fore you some presumptive arguments, V.

in favour of Christianity, having, in
some past discourses, considered the life
and character of our Saviour, as it is taken
from the Evangelists, and endeavoured to
shew,

hence

SERM. shew, that it is above the power of fiction,
V. I shall, in this discourse, consider the life

and character of the Apostle Paul, who, though he was called to be an apostle later than the others, yet says very justly concerning himself, *that he was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles*; he was, in truth, in many respects, the most eminent of them all.

But, in entering upon this argument, I must take it for granted, that there was such a person in the world, who professed Christianity, and was a teacher of it, and who spent much of his life in travelling through many countries to propagate this religion; that there were really such societies of Christians as the churches of *Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Galatia, Thessalonica, Colosse* and *Philippi*, amongst whom Paul had laboured, and some of them had founded; that the epistles, which we have, in the scriptures, directed to these churches in his name, were known to the primitive Christians, and acknowledged to be his; that there were such men as *Timothy* and *Titus, Barnabas* and *Luke*, with many others, who were this apostle's fellow-labourers. Indeed all these things are supported

ported very fully by all that kind of evil-SERM.

V.

deance, which the nature of them will admit, as the apologists for Christianity have often shewed; and he, who will deny the whole, must have got to a most absurd degree of scepticism. Let us then take a view of the life and character of this excellent man, and try, whether they do not furnish some strong presumptive arguments of the truth and divine authority of the religion of Christ.

The account, which the scriptures give us concerning him, is this; that he was educated under one of the most learned Jewish doctors, who was of the strictest sect; that, under this discipline, he prosecuted exceedingly, and became eminent in knowledge, strictness of life, and zeal for the law; that he had conceived such prejudices and aversion against the Christian name and way, as being an impious heresy, that he thought it his duty to do what he could to put an end to the profession, and blot out the remembrance of it; that he distinguished himself by this blind zeal in Jerusalem, and was exceedingly active in the persecutions, which were raised against Christians, breathing out threatening and

SERM. slaughter against them; that, not content-
 ed with this, he travelled abroad and per-
 secuted them in strange cities; that as he
 was in a journey to *Damascus* to serve this
 end, he was converted to the Christian
 faith by a miraculous appearance of Christ
 to him, and was immediately called to be
 an Apostle; that, having staid a few days
 at *Damascus* in retirement, he openly ap-
 peared preaching Christ; and, from that
 time, spent his whole life in publish-
 ing Christianity to the world, and especi-
 ally to the *Gentiles*, who were more pecu-
 liarly given him in charge; founded many
 societies of Christians, and visited others, tra-
 velling incessantly, and in a state of almost
 continued persecution, in which he suffered
 most barbarous usage.


Now, the question is, whether in preach-
 ing the gospel, the apostle spake the words
 of truth and soberness, or was propagating
 falshood? If there was no foundation in
 truth for the religion, which he taught
 mankind, either he knew this, and so acted
 the part of an impostor through the whole
 of life; or, by the force of enthusiasm,
 he was persuaded of the truth of Christia-
 nity himself, but without any solid founda-
 tion.

tion, The adversaries of the Christian SERM.
faith must necessarily fix upon one or other V.
of these; and if, upon a fair enquiry, it
shall appear, that neither of them could be
the case, nothing can remain, but that we
believe the apostle was a person of a sober
mind, and of integrity, and taught what
he knew to be truth.

Let it be first inquired, whether there is
any probability of his having been an im-
postor? And here the following things
are to be carefully considered.

First, what could be his aim, in propa-
gating such an imposture in the world?
The account, which he himself giveth us
of his ministry, is, that he taught *repent-
ance towards God, and faith in our Lord
Jesus Christ*. This was indeed his whole
business, as appeareth from many express
declarations, and the general strain of his
writings. He was setting up no party or
faction, which could serve any temporal
interest. His whole labour was directed to
this end only, that men might be persuaded
to believe in Jesus Christ crucified and risen
again, as their Saviour and Lord; and
might be, in pursuance of this, reclaimed
from all unrighteous courses, and be-
come

SERMON. come holy in all manner of conversation.

V.  Whithersoever he went, there were the points, which he laboured; applying himself equally to all men, of all nations, whatever their peculiar genius, circumstances, interests, manners, customs, and religious principles were. And where men received his testimony and became Christians, he gave them instructions to assemble together, from time to time, for the worship of God; and to encourage one another in the practice of religion, and animadvert upon such of their profession as were guilty of scandalous sins; and that these purposes might be more effectually served, he ordained elders in every church. This is all. And to accomplish what he intended, he never could use, neither had it in his thought to use, any means and methods, but *the manifestation of the truth*, and arguments taken from the nature of the religion, which he taught; from the miraculous works, by which the most solemn attention was given to it, as of divine authority; and from the prophecies, of which it was the completion.

Secondly, he did not endeavour to subject such, as were converted by his means,

to himself as their head, nor ever pretended SAM. to any dominion over them; but laboured V. this point as much as any thing whatsoever, that they should be thoroughly persuaded, that they owed no allegiance to any, but to Christ Jesus. Him he preached, as the only Lord of Christians; glorifying himself in being a servant of Christ, and devoted intirely to his interest and cause. Now, this person, whom it was the business of the apostle's life to recommend to the world as Saviour and Lord, was dead; and with this remarkable circumstance, that he was crucified at *Jerusalem* as a malefactor. What then was to be expected from him? What honour? What emolument of a temporal kind? If, then, the apostle was an impostor, he was supporting the cause, and serving the interest, of another impostor, from whom, neither he, nor any one else, could have the least expectation; and, besides, had so little understanding, as to load his own scheme, and design, with all the prejudices, which lay against another person, who, as a gross and impious deceiver, had been put to an infamous death: nay, was so absolutely bereft of all sense, as to glory in

SERM. in the crucifixion of Christ; and to insist upon it, as of the utmost importance, in Christianity.

** I determine to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* If the apostle aimed at any thing, in this world, as the end he served, (and surely imposture cannot be supposed to aim at any thing else) he must have acted the most impolitic and absurd part, which can be imagined.

Thirdly, when he set out as an apostle of Christ, he knew very well, that there were numbers of Christians in *Jerusalem*, and other places; and that there were persons, who professed to be witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, and pretended to be commissioned by him to preach his religion. Now, as all that *Paul* could have in view was the success and establishment of that religion in the world; so, upon the present supposition of its being an imposture, it might be expected, that when he resolved to enter into this design, he should have, first of all, acquainted himself with what these men thought, and made himself master of the scheme; which, certainly, as it could not have entered into the thoughts

** 1 Cor. ii. 2.*

of

of the *Gentiles*, so was most distant from *SERM.*

what the *Jews* believed concerning their

Messiah, and expected from him ; and

Paul himself had formerly persecuted men

of this way to the death, as wicked persons,

who were putting a cheat upon the world :

I say, when he determined to go into this

design, and support the imposture, it would

have been natural for him to have acted in

concert with these persons, who were the

principal managers in this astonishing affair.

But we find he took quite another method.

He set up independently of them, and

without receiving any instructions from

them. He immediately preached Christ in

Damascus, and in the countries adjacent ;

and was not so much as known to the

Apostles at *Jerusalem*, for a considerable

time afterwards. So then here is a person,

who, from being a violent persecutor of

Christians, became a most zealous advocate

for their religion ; and without any concert

with the most leading persons, goeth about

preaching it, that is propagating their im-

posture, not attending, whether he agreed

or disagreed with them ; setting up upon

his own foundation, and not pretending

credit or commission from any mortal, but

nly

SERMON, only from Jesus Christ, who was dead, and whose cross he preached. If the secret of the imposture was only in a few hands, which, if it was an imposture, must have been the case, and those few were the persons, who pretended to be witnesses of our Lord's resurrection; surely a man of understanding, who intended to propagate the deceit, would have communicated his design to them; and would have taken care, that their common story should be perfectly consistent, and likewise to have made the best terms for himself, and to be sure of sharing largely in the gain, which was to be got by the fable. I say, had he determined to enter into the design of other impostures, this is the method he must have taken: and if we should suppose, that the other apostles were not impostors, but deluded enthusiasts, propagating what, in their phrenzy, they believed to be true, and that *Paul* meant to avail himself of their delusion, and make his advantage of their story; still it would have been necessary to his purpose, that he should be acquainted perfectly with what they taught, and their account of the facts, upon which they founded their scheme. But we find nothing

nothing of all this; nay, immediately, *SERM.*

V.

without troubling himself about these matters, he preacheth Christ, that he is the Son of God, and surpriseth all, who knew or had heard of him in time past; He cometh abroad into the world in the character of an apostle, as fully instructed in the religion of Christ as any of them, and becometh the most successful teacher among them. That in this manner, and these circumstances, he set out, we have good reason to believe, feeling he himself most solemnly affirmeth it, on an occasion, in which he was called upon by the vexatious opposition, which some adversaries gave him, to vindicate himself and his doctrine, and at a time when, if his account of these circumstances had been false, it would have been easy to have detected him. There never, surely, was any thing, that looked less like an imposture than this; nor can any one imagine, that, if the apostle had determined to assist in carrying on a cheat, he would have taken such measures.

Here it ought to be particularly observed, that, if he was an impostor, the design of his pretended conversion to the

Christian

SERM. Christian faith was, with respect to the V. circumstances of it, most foolishly laid and conducted. The account, which he gives of it, is, that when he was upon the road to *Damascus*, and near to the city, all of a sudden a light shined around him, and the men who journeyed with him; and when they were all fallen to the earth, *Paul* heard the voice of *Jesus* speaking to him; that when he arose from the earth, he found himself blind, and was led by some of the company into the city; that he was there three days without meat or drink; that he was miraculously cured of his blindness by a Christian named *Ananias*, who was sent to him by an express divine command for this purpose: and immediately after this he was baptised. Upon this, it is very natural to ask, supposing *Paul* an impostor, why he did not pretend conviction of the truth of Christianity, without such a train of miracles as the cause of it; which, in reality, to men, who were not disposed to believe him, must lay in strong prejudices against him? He might have taken up the profession, surely, without assigning such wonderful reasons for his doing so. Again, how came he to tell a story so extraordinary,

traordinary, which could not gain credit SERM.

V.

were in company with him? How many there were, we know not; but had they contradicted him then, or at any time afterwards, they must have ruined his cause. And would an artful impostor have trusted them? Safer it had been for him to have pretended, that he was alone when he saw this vision. In that case, so far as his credit could go, the story would have taken, and no man would have had it in his power to contradict it from his own knowledge. *Ananias* likewise must be trusted and in the plot; and the persons, with whom *Paul* lodged, must be trusted in many things. And after trusting his secret, upon the keeping of which all his success depended, with so many, immediately, in that very city, where there was a fair opportunity of inquiring into the truth of these facts, and where this cause was so much hated and despised, that undoubtedly very many would be extremely fond of detecting the imposture, he assumeth his public character, and preacheth Christ in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God. Would any impostor of common sense have

Sara. have put the success of his pretensions to *W.* such a hazard?

Fourthly, he very well knew what abhorrence his countrymen had of the Christian name, and with what bitterness and cruelty persons of that denomination were persecuted; and how he himself had used them, greatly to the advancement of his reputation in *Judea*. And certainly he could expect no better usage himself, as soon as he took upon him the profession of Christianity, and to be a teacher of that religion. Whatever hopes he might have entertained of preferment in his own country, from his abilities natural and acquired, from the exactness of his life, and zeal for the law of *Moses*, he very well knew, that he must give them all up, and be had in detestation by the *Jews*, as a vile apostate; so much the more to be hated and abhorred, as he was esteemed and admired before. Nothing the *Jews* could with less patience bear, than preaching Christ, whom they had crucified, as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. And *Paul* must not only be looked upon as an apostate, but at the same time as one, who would fix upon them the greatest guilt

guilt and most infamous reproach. And he SERM.

V.

must foresee, that they would do whatever was in their power to persecute and destroy him; especially, when it is considered, that he not only preached Christ crucified as the Messiah, but, in consequence of that, set himself to put an end to the whole of their ecclesiastical constitution. All this must, with respect to his countrymen, have been fully in his view.

And what could he expect amongst the *Gentiles*? He was to preach Christ crucified, which was to the *Greeks* foolishness. He was to propagate and endeavour to establish a religion among them, which could not prevail but upon the ruins of all the religions, and all the divinities, which the several nations had embraced; and for which, no question, many among them, who were of a devoted turn of mind, would be very zealous. His religion would not blend with, would not endure any of the idolatry and superstition of the heathen world. All, who embraced it, must renounce the gods of their fathers, and of their country, for ever; and so all the civil powers, by which they were established, and all the priests, which ministered to them,

SERM. them, and by that craft had their wealth;

V. must be utter enemies to him and to Christianity; and he had all the prejudices of the blinded multitude, wherever he came, to struggle against. How strong these are and how obstinate; all, who know any thing of the history of the world, must be sensible. Not only so, but he was to preach a religion, to which the spirit of this world, and all the lusts of it, stood in opposition. No man could embrace this religion, and pursue the design of it, without renouncing these, and maintaining a constant war against them, in a life of strict virtue, and severe self-denial: so that the apostle must be sensible, that he had all the superstitious and all the wicked of the world against him. Astonishing imposture, if it was an imposture, which, absolutely disclaiming all help from the superstitions, weakness, and lusts of mankind, and setting itself in direct opposition to them all, could no way prevail, but by the power of conscience in men, and the principles of virtue!

Nor was this all; for as soon as any Jew or Gentile, became a convert to the Christian faith, he must become an object of

of hatred and aversion, of scorn and contempt to his neighbours, and be liable to all manner of persecution and ill usage; and he must foresee this; so that the apostle

was not only to persuade men to embrace a religion, against which there lay the strongest prejudices of all sorts, arising from a religion, in which they had been educated, and from wicked lusts, but to embrace it at the hazard of all that was dear to them in this world; a religion, the profession and practice of which they could not maintain without being willing to give up temporal interest, and life itself. Could any impostor, who was not utterly void of understanding, ever imagine, that he should be able to establish such an imposture as this! that he could reconcile men to the loss of fortune and life, and persuade them to take his word for happiness after death, instead of the present! The supposition is, in truth, quite ridiculous.

Lastly, it is evident, that the apostle pretended to a power of working miracles, in innumerable instances, and in the eyes of multitudes of persons; miracles of the most extraordinary kind, and to which he

P

often

SERM. often appealed as a sensible and irresistible

V.

proof, that God was with him, and that the religion, which he taught, was of divine authority. We cannot indeed have the testimony of those, upon whom the miracles were worked, or of eye-witnesses; but it is evident, from the whole strain of this apostle's writings, that as he pretended to this power, so he had amongst Christians an unquestionable character, as a person endowed with it. This must have been firmly believed in the Christian churches, or else the greatest part of his writings are absurd beyond imagination. Now, what an astonishing boldness, what an impudence of imposture, must it be, to pretend to such a power, where there was not the least reality! to lay such a stress upon it, in solemn appeals to the world! in appeals to multitudes, who were alleged to be witnesses of the facts! To do this act at a time, when the stream of prejudice, in great and small, was against him! when he was every-where opposed, and persecuted, and liable to be detected by his enemies, than which, if he was an impostor, nothing could have been more easily done! Surely, a person of common

mon understanding, in an attempt to put an SERM.

V.



imposture upon the world, would not have hazarded his credit so uncautiously. It was madness to rest his whole authority upon such a foundation. And that he could beget in the minds of such numbers a firm belief, that he did work such miracles, when there was no such thing, is likewise, considering the circumstances which he was in, quite unaccountable. But of this I shall afterwards have occasion to treat more particularly.

When these things are laid together, it will appear utterly impossible, that *Paul* should have been an impostor. A man of excellent understanding (for so he evidently was) devoteth his life to the ministration of the gospel, without not only any discernible view, but any plausible view of setting up any party, or faction, or interest, which could be of real service to him, with respect to this world; the sole tendency of his ministry being to beget faith in the true God, and in Jesus Christ; and, as the consequence of it, the greatest purity of sentiment and life, the greatest goodness of heart and beneficence. And, supposing him an impostor, he framed this imposture so as to do the highest possible honour,

SERM. honour, not to himself, but to a person,

V. who, upon this supposition, was another impostor; and from whom, as he was dead, no expectations could be raised.

He set out upon this work in a character directly the reverse of what he was before; and upon a pretence of conviction from certain facts, in which, if he had been imposing upon the world, he might have been easily detected. He set out intirely upon furniture and a foundation of his own, without any concert with those, who were the principal leaders in this imposture: he pursued a design, which made him perfectly detestable to his own countrymen; and which, not only cut him off from all reputation, and hope of raising himself among them, but exposed him to their implacable rage and malice. He exposed himself likewise to persecution among the *Gentiles*; and entered into a declared war with all the superstitions and all the wicked lusts of mankind. And he did all this in his own single strength; without having one great or powerful person in his party. But then he pretended to work miracles; and in such a manner, that all persons had an opportunity of satisfying

fyng themselves as to the truth of the *SERM.*

facts; and his craft succeeded so, that vast

V.

numbers, who had this opportunity of inquiring and judging, believed him. And he persevered in carrying on this imposture to his dying day, though in a scene of continued persecution and suffering; and, at the last, lost his life in the cause; and must have had a clear foresight of this persecution, from the very beginning of his ministry. Let any man soberly consider, whether it is possible to believe all this; and to be satisfied, that the apostle was an impostor? Especially, when to all it is added, that, in whatsoever instance he saw his fellow Christians deviating from what he professed as the truth, be their station and character what it would, he openly opposed them, as a person no way apprehensive, that his cause would suffer by such opposition; and as one, who was determined to follow truth whithersoever it would lead him, though in opposition to the greatest credit and authority of man.

I humbly think, that there needeth no more to satisfy the impartial, that *Paul* really believed what he taught the world. Yet it may cast an additional light upon

SERM. the argument, that, upon this last supposition, his whole history and character are perfectly consistent, and the accounts, that we have of him, bear all the marks of truth, which could be wished for.

It hath been already observed, with what what an inflamed zeal he had persecuted the Christian church. * *He verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth ;* and accounted that persecution a good and meritorious work. This sheweth how strong his prejudices against the Christian religion were ; and how little he was disposed to receive any impressions in its favour. We may very well suppose, if he had been so far candid and impartial, as to give a fair hearing to the evidences of the truth of Christianity, taken from prophecies and miracles, and the nature and tendency of that religion, that then he might have been thoroughly convinced, without such an extraordinary interposition as that of the appearance of Christ to him, or any miracle at all wrought on his behalf. But the greatest difficulty is to bring men, who are strongly prejudiced against the truth,

* Acts xxvi. 9.

to attend seriously to the evidences of it, SERM.

V.

and weigh them impartially. Now, the miraculous appearance of our Saviour to him did not only over-rule all prejudice, and prepare his mind for receiving the truth (which his thoughts afterwards upon the prophecies concerning *Messiah*, and his attention to the whole plan, would greatly confirm to him;) but this appearance of our Saviour seemeth to have been intended likewise to qualify him for the station, to which he was called, of an apostle, and witness of the resurrection and exalted state of our Lord. For so it is represented in scripture, that it was, more peculiarly, the business and character of the apostles to be witnesses to the world of the resurrection of Christ. *Paul* could not only bear testimony upon the credit of others; but could testify, what he himself had seen and heard.

But suppose him once a thorough convert to that faith, which he had a long time sought to destroy; in pursuance of which design, he had committed very great cruelties; and what a strong remorse must he feel? Accordingly we see in his writings notice taken of this, and in terms, which

SERM. which are the most natural and affecting ;

V. *expressions of such penitence, as might be expected from a person, who, from being a violent persecutor of Christianity, became a sincere convert to it. * I am the least of all the apostles, who am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God ; but by the grace of God, I am what I am.—† Ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews religion, how that, beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it.—‡ And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he accounted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a persecutor, and blasphemer, and injurious : but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.—|| To me, that am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach amongst the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.—*† This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the World to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus should shew forth all long-*

* 1 Cor. xv. 9.

† Gal. i. 13.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 13.

|| Ephes. iii. 8.

*† 1 Tim. i. 15.

suffering,

*suffering, for a pattern to them, who should SERM.
hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. V.*

These are expressions, which do not at all savour of imposture ; but seem to come from the heart. And as in these and such other passages, we see a deep sense of the evil, which he had done in persecuting Christians, and opposing himself to our Blessed Saviour and his interests, so there is the utmost gratitude for the grace of God to him, and the most natural expressions of an humble mind admiring the riches of it ; we see a temper every-where discovered, perfectly suitable to the state of a person, who, with the deepest self-abasement for his past life, found himself, by the mercy of God, raised to the highest dignity in the Christian church, and to the most glorious hopes.

Again, how strong the expressions of ardent love to our Blessed Saviour, and zeal for his interests in the world ! If the apostle was at first an enemy to the religion of Christ, and a persecutor of the professors of it, and afterwards became a true and hearty convert to it, in a manner and by means so extraordinary, as he himself, in several accounts of his life, testifieth ; then

SERM. then indeed it was to be expected, that the

V. sense of what he had been and done in enmity against our Saviour, and his cause, should give a very peculiar warmth to his affection towards him, and a peculiar edge to his zeal. And accordingly, we meet with the most emphatical expressions of these, every-where in his writings; his language seemeth to labour in expressing what he felt. * *The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all once dead; that they, who live, should no more live to themselves, but to him, who died for them, and rose again.—† What mean ye to weep, and to break my heart, for I am willing, not only to be bound at Jerusalem, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.—‡ None of these things move me, neither account I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy and fulfill the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.—|| Yea doubtless, and I account all things loss for excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suf-*

* 2 Cor. v. 14. † Acts xxi. 13. ‡ Ib. xx. 24.

|| Philip. iii. 8.

ferred the loss of all things, and count them SERM.

but dung, that I may win Christ—that I V.

may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and may be made conformable to his death.

—* God forbid, that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.

Time would fail to mention all the passages, which might be offered to illustrate this. Every attentive reader must see, that the apostle is in constant solicitude, that the highest honour may be done to our Saviour; and that he sheweth the most ardent love to him, and zeal for his cause and religion, which he propagated to the last, with all possible patience of labour and suffering, and even with a mind full of joy and triumph in them.

Farther, if the apostle really designed what only he professed to design; namely, the persuading men to embrace Christianity, and to go into that course of life, which this religion prescribeth as necessary to prepare them for a happy immortality; if he had, in truth, the cause of God, and the good of mankind in his aim, as what he

SERM. intended by all means possible to serve;

V. in that case, it appeareth from his writings, and what we know of his life, that he took the most natural and proper methods, fit to serve these ends, and no way fit to serve any other. He laid before men the grounds and reasons, upon which he himself had embraced Christianity; and upon which all, who impartially considered them, must be induced to embrace it: He gave abundant proof, that our Blessed Lord was the promised Messiah, and Saviour of the world; endeavouring to establish his authority as head of the Christian church, and to shew the importance of faith in him: He taught the absolute necessity of holiness, to make men meet for the inheritance of the saints in light: He giveth a clear account of that pure, devout, liberal, and benevolent spirit, which is the true Christian spirit; he sheweth clearly the opposition, which ever must take place between this temper, and the genius and spirit of the world; the necessity of subduing the latter, and of subjecting all passions and interests to conscience and the sense of duty; he fully establisheth God's moral government, and teacheth, that every

every individual shall at the last give an ac-

SERM.

V.

count of himself, and receive according to his works: in a word, he inculcates upon Christians the love of God, and charity; as the end of the commandment; and sheweth, that no privileges, or endowments, will be of any avail to the purposes of salvation without it. Thus, as a teacher, he acted a part perfectly worthy of his relation to Jesus Christ, of the warmest zeal for true virtue and religion, and of the most benevolent spirit and the greatest goodwill to mankind; a part becoming a person, who professed, * *That his rejoicing was in the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had his conversation; and who tells us, that he † was not as many, who corrupted the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, spake in Christ.* The truth is, there is such a manifest appearance of simplicity and sincerity in all his writings, that one cannot attentively peruse them, without believing, that he spoke from his very heart.

* 2 Cor. i. 12. † Ib. ii. 17.

Let

SERM.

V.

Let it be considered, in the last place, that, though in his profession of being converted to Christianity, and in his assuming the character of an apostle, and submitting to the labours and sufferings, to which, in that station, he was called, he acted a part, which (upon the supposition of Christianity's being an imposture, and his knowing it to be so) was most absurd and irrational; yet upon supposition, that he believed that religion to be of divine authority, and himself called by our Blessed Saviour to be an apostle, it was a part most worthy and wise. If he believed, that *Jesus Christ* was the promised Messiah, that he was risen from the dead, and invested with all power and authority in heaven and earth; that, therefore, the cause of Christianity was the cause of God, and served and carried on under the special care and protection of heaven; he had no reason to be daunted at any opposition, which he saw could be made to it, or to those, who were employed in propagating it in the world. If God was for him, it was no matter who was against him. And though he not only knew, that all the powers on earth would set themselves against

against the religion of Christ, and that he SERM.

V.

must foresee, that their embracing of it, and professing it, would lay them open to very grievous suffering; but soon found, that great and vexatious difficulties lay in his way, arising from the weaknesses of some, and the perverse tempers of others, who took upon them the Christian profession, and became members of the Christian church, (of which he frequently complaineth, and probably they gave him more uneasiness, than all that he suffered from declared enemies;) yet, sensible of divine countenance and support, he must needs think all those inconveniences of little moment. And when in the course of his ministry he found, that God was with him, and that miraculous power attended him, with what constancy and resolution must he go on, impregnable by the most violent opposition, which could be made to his attempts! Under almighty protection, he was serving the very best of causes, and the most important to mankind; a cause, which he knew would most assuredly prevail; and as for his own particular interest, he knew, that it was safe; he

SERM. he might indeed suffer deeply in this

V. world ; but then he saw a glorious state in reserve for him, in the world above. * *For which cause I suffer these things, yet I am not ashamed ; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded, that he is able to keep what I have committed to him unto that day.*

—† *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give unto me ; and not to me only, but to all them likewise, who love his appearance.*

Thus I have endeavoured to shew, that as there is not the least reason to imagine, that *Paul* was an impostor, so there is the strongest reason to believe, that he spoke what he knew to be truth ; and which had so possessed his own heart, that the whole of his life and conduct was regulated by it ; and shall now conclude, with recommending to your thoughts his farewell discourse to the elders of *Ephesus* ; in which we may see his very heart disclosed ; and which, I think, beareth such characters of being genuine, that the evidence is not to

* 2 Tim. i. 12. † Ib. iv. 7.

be resisted; we have it in *Acts* xx, from *SERM.*

ver. 17. *And from Miletus he sent to V.*

Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

And when they were come to him, he said unto them; Ye know, from the first day that

I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many

tears, and temptations, which besell me, by

the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing, which was profitable to

you; but have shewed you, and have taught

you publicly, and from house to house, testi-

fying both to the Jews, and also to the

Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith

toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now

behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem,

not knowing the things, which shall befall

me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth

in every city, that bonds and afflictions abide

me: but none of these things move me, nei-

ther count I myself dear unto myself, so that

I might finish my course with joy, and

the ministry, which I have received of the

Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace

of God. And now behold I know, that ye

all, among whom I have gone preaching the

Kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

Wherefore

Q

SERM. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that

V. I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to deliver unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that for the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among them, which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them, that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

S E R -

S E R M O N VI.

The character and life of the Apostle
Paul.

ACTS XX. 24.

*But none of these things move me,
neither count I my life dear un-
to myself, so that I might finish
my course with joy, and the mi-
nisty, which I have received of
the Lord Jesus, to testify the gos-
pel of the grace of God.*

IT hath been observed, in the last disc. SERM. VI. {
course, that if the religion, which
the Apostle Paul taught, and with the
utmost diligence propagated in the world,
was without any foundation in truth ;
either he perfectly knew this, and so acted
the

SERM. the part of an impostor ; or, by the mere force of enthusiasm, he was persuaded of the truth of it himself, but without any sound reason. In one or other of these suppositions, such as deny the truth and divine authority of the Christian religion must rest. I have already endeavoured to shew, that the apostle could not be an impostor : let us now inquire, whether from mere enthusiasm a tolerable account can be given of the part, which he acted.

That men have imagined divine impulses and inspirations without any reality, and that they have suffered great agitation and transport, which was all the work of their own over-heated fancy, is not to be denied. I shall not go about to assign the causes, or recount the many wonderful appearances, or the various kinds and degrees of this ; which would lead me to the consideration of many things, difficult to be accounted for, and to a tedious disquisition, not at all necessary to the purpose of the present argument. It is enough to observe, in general, that so far as enthusiasm prevaileth, understanding and sound judgment are laid aside. Men lose the calm and undisturbed use of their own powers ;
and

and are carried on by a heated imagination, SERM.
which is quite beyond the controul of rea- VI.
son ; and it is known, that, in many instances, this hath arisen to a perfect phrenzy.

But certainly there is a great difference between this disorder of the mind, and those affections of it, which are naturally excited by a just discernment of the objects presented to it. What appeareth to us great and beautiful, if the mind is in a natural state, we cannot but admire and love ; and our admiration and love must be in proportion to the degree of greatness, excellency, and beauty, discerned in the object. Now, any natural emotions, which are caused by such admiration, and the ardors of such love are so far from rising upon the ruins of good understanding and judgment, that they really arise from them ; and it sheweth want of discernment and taste, not to be affected. To apply this to the affairs of religion ; as the Supreme Being is an object great beyond all comprehension, and possessed of all possible perfection, especially of those moral perfections, which render him infinitely amiable ; so it is the law of our nature, that

SERM. that we should love him with our whole
VI, hearts: and surely just conceptions of God,

in a proper state of the mind, cannot but be attended with the highest admiration and love; which is not at all inconsistent with the clearest and freest use of our rational powers, but indeed resulteth from it; and doth not hurt, but greatly strengthen the mind. If there are what we may call raptures in the love of God, they do not destroy or interrupt the serenity of the soul, but establish it rather, and raise it into a temper, which the most cool reflecting thoughts approve, and which yieldeth a pure and solid joy. And while the expressions of divine goodness, especially as it appeareth in the gospel of our Saviour, and a sense of *his* love, who, in pursuance of the counsels of the Father, came into the world, and suffered, and died for us, beget in the heart the utmost gratitude and an ardent zeal in the cause of Christianity; or, in the language of the apostle, *if there be constraints in the love of Christ*, certainly this is no more, than what is natural and just; and what the coolest and most dispassionate believer would account rational, as well as dutiful, to encourage. And, therefore,

therefore, if we see through the writings SERM.
of this apostle such a spirit breathing in VI.
the strongest expressions, and most affecting
strains, it is quite unreasonable from this
merely, to pronounce him an enthusiast.
The name of enthusiasm, as it is generally
used to signify a distemper of the mind,
ought not to be given to those honest feelings
of the heart, to which no one, who
hath a just sense of the greatness and goodness
of God, can be a stranger.

Again, although there may be imaginations of divine impulse upon the mind, and of inspiration, where all is the mere creature of a distempered fancy; yet we cannot, from the vanity and absurdity of this sort of enthusiasm only, conclude, that there was never any such thing as real inspiration or revelation. The truth is, the many pretences, which have been made to it, and the favourable reception, which they have met with in the world, shew rather, that it is not disagreeable to the sense of mankind, that there should be such a thing; and no man hath yet undertaken to shew a natural impossibility in it. So that there is great reason to inquire, with diligence and candour, into the evidences,

SERM. dences, upon which the scriptures have
VI. been recommended to us, as containing a
revelation from God, and upon which they
have obtained credit in the world.

With respect to the apostle *Paul*; as it
hath been shewn, that he could not be an
impostor, so, from the following confide-
rations, it will, I hope, evidently appear,
that he was not an enthusiast; that is, one,
who, without any foundation in truth and
fact, stedfastly believed what he taught the
world.

First, it is plain, that those, to whom
he preached the gospel, had not generally
any such idea of him. Some of them
might possibly look upon him as a mad-
man: but this was not the general sense,
either of his friends or enemies. The
former believed, that he was sent of God
to preach Christianity to the world. The
others undoubtedly looked upon him, not
as a person distracted, but as an impious
impostor; especially those of his own
country. For this reason they persecuted
him, as one of the worst and most hateful
malefactors. Had he been accounted a
madman, it would have been proper to re-
strain him; but to persecute a poor crea-
ture

ture, who was in the highest distraction, SERM.

VI. ~

as a criminal, and even to death, was an inhumanity, which the laws and customs of no civilized country would admit of. Great compassion is due to such objects ; but cruelty towards them is what all must condemn, as most barbarous and inexcusable. I speak of the highest distraction ; for it is certain, if he did what he did, and believed what he professed to believe, by the mere force of enthusiasm, he must have been in the greatest possible degree of distraction by it. He giveth us a particular account of the circumstances of his own conversion ; that he was surprized with a light shining round him, above the brightness of the sun ; that it struck him blind ; that he heard a voice speaking to him in the name of Christ ; that when he had been three days in *Damascus*, without meat or drink, a person, called *Ananias*, came to him to put his hands on him, that he might receive his sight ; and that, upon this, there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and forthwith his sight was restored ; when yet, in all this, there was nothing but mere dream and delusion ! Again, in the course of his ministry, he exercised

SERM. exercised miraculous powers of all kinds ;

VI. he spoke all sorts of languages, and was understood wheresoever he went, by the multitudes, which gathered about him ; he healed the sick ; he cast out devils ; he gave feet to the lame ; and communicated likewise to others such miraculous powers, by the laying on of his hands. He did these things frequently through the course of his life ; and appealeth to multitudes for the truth of them : and yet there was nothing real in all this ! it was only a visionary scene, which a disordered imagination created ! and he was never once so much himself, through the whole of his life, as to find out, that he was deluded ! We cannot, surely, conceive any thing in the utmost distraction superior to this ; and we may just as reasonably suppose, that the apostle believed, that he travelled through *Asia the less*, and *Syria*, and that he went to *Rome*, and did such things in these places, as are recorded of him, and that he founded societies of Christians in many cities ; when yet he had never been in such places, nor ever stirred his foot out of his own dwelling !

But

But let us consider his writings, and see

SERM.

VI.

whether a person, so disordered in his senses, can be supposed to have been the author of them. We there see an excellent understanding, and capable of reasoning justly; we see a scheme of religion, perfectly consistent with itself; we see a spirit of devotion, and charity, which cannot but recommend itself to every ingenuous and good mind; we meet with the noblest sentiments, and the most natural; his precepts and directions to Christians for the conduct of life, such as became a very wise and a very good man; his own sense of things (especially of his station as a minister and apostle of Christ, and of the sufferings, which he met with in the prosecution of his ministry) what perfectly suited his character; his steadiness and constancy such, as might be expected from a person of the coolest judgment, acting upon principles of the truth, of which he had the most rational conviction. And are we to expect all this from a man, who, in a course of many years, was in the utmost enthusiastic distraction, and had not one lucid interval? Or can any judicious impartial reader so much as once imagine, that

SERM. that the writings of the Apostle Paul are
VI. the works of a madman ?

But there are two things, which may be truly called demonstrations, that there was no such phrenetic turn of mind in the apostle. First, that though he had no concert with the other apostles, which is the account he himself giveth, and which, upon the present supposition, that there was no deceit or imposture intended, we must believe ; for he tells us, that the gospel, which he preached, he did not receive from man, but *by revelation from Jesus Christ* ; and that, upon his conversion, he did not go up to *Jerusalem*, to them, who were apostles before him : I say, though he had no concert with the other apostles, yet he taught the same doctrines with them ; and in all things discovereth a perfect understanding of the Christian religion. All the main lines of it are the same in him as in them. The spiritual kingdom of the Messiah ; immortality, brought to light ; the means of attaining to it, and all that, which concerneth the Christian life, are fully and clearly taught by him : and it is evident, that his plan is the same, which our Blessed Saviour

viour himself laid, and upon which all the SERM.
apostles went. Now, how is it conceiv- VI. ~

able, that a disordered, and distracted imagination, should have produced a plan and design of such a variety of parts, perfectly agreeable to that of other men, with whom he had no correspondence? He, in a phrenzy, goes about the world to preach a religion, which, to answer the end, must be the same in all material points with that, which the other apostles taught, to whom he is a perfect stranger; and he acteth upon their principles and tenets exactly, and sheweth, that he understood the design as thoroughly as any of them. Surely a man of sense will look for some other cause of this, than the madness of enthusiasm; for nothing can be more ridiculously absurd, than to ascribe it to that cause. And it may be observed farther, that though the apostle taught the same things, which the other apostles taught, yet, in some points, he had a clearer and more extended view given him; particularly, with respect to the abrogation of the *Mosaic* law, and the calling of the *Gentiles*, without distinction, into the Christian church. He frequently mentioneth

SERM. tioneth this, and glorieth in it, that to him

VI. was given the grace to preach among the
Gentiles the unspeakable riches of Christ,

** and to make all men know the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning was hid in God.* And though it was made known to the other apostles, that God would grant repentance unto life to the *Gentiles*; yet it was from *Paul*, that the world had the clearest and fullest information of this matter: so that, as from a master of the design, other Christians, and even the apostles, received improvement from him, and accordingly, we see in the history, used him with the greatest respect. He was likewise the great advocate for Christian liberty; and pleaded most strenuously for the union of all Christians in one heart, and in pursuing the great common design, notwithstanding any difference of sentiments, in matters of less importance, which might be among them: and indeed sheweth, in all respects, that he was perfectly in the right tract of serving the interests of Christianity, and of propagating it in the world. And shall all this be accounted for by a mind so disorder-

Ephes. iii. 9.

dered,

dered, and distracted, as not to be able to SERM.

VI.

judge, even in the most obvious occurrences, and with respect to facts, which lie open to the senses of every man?

Secondly, it would be impossible to account for what the apostle did and wrote, by any supposable force of enthusiasm in himself, if we do not imagine the world about him, to be equally under the influence of the phrenzy. I believe, that the objectors to Christianity will not at all pretend, that there were not societies of Christians founded by the *Apostle Paul*, to whom he writeth epistles, and which subsisted long after; such as the churches of *Corinth*, *Galatia*, *Thessalonica*, and others. This is a matter too certain to admit of dispute. Now these societies of Christians received the Christian faith from the *Apostle Paul*; and it manifestly appears from his writings, that they rested upon his authority, which was, to their full satisfaction, demonstrated; as by other concurring circumstances, so more especially by the miracles, which he worked among them. Not only so, but it is plain, that his writings, in very many places, suppose it a thing publickly known, and which was unquestionable, that

SERM. that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy VI. Ghost, and a power of working miracles,

were communicated to many of these primitive Christians. We see he appealeth to this, in the epistle to the *Galatians*, iii. 2. *This only would I learn of you ; received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the bearing of faith ? Are ye so foolish, having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ?—He therefore, who ministereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doth he it, by the works of the law, or by the bearing of faith ?* And in the first epistle to the *Corinthians*, the twelfth and fourteenth chapters, he doth at great length treat concerning the miraculous powers, wherewith Christians were endowed, the proper use of them, and those regulations, under which the exercise of them ought constantly to be kept, that the great end, the edification of the church, might be successfully served. *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit ; and there are differences of administrations, but the same lord ; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

wisdom. For to one is given, by the spirit, SERM.
 the word of wisdom; to another, the word VI.

of knowledge, by the same spirit; to another, faith, by the same spirit; to another, the gift of healing, by the same spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues.

But all these worketh that one and the same spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. And in the fourteenth chapter, he treateth particularly of the miraculous power of speaking in divers tongues, pointeth out the proper use of it, and censureth some irregularities, which were in the Corinthian church, in that respect. Now here is an appeal made to facts, in which all these Christians could not but be proper judges. And is it to be imagined, that there were no such facts known among them? Or that the apostle could have the least credit amongst these people, if he spoke so much of things, which every one of them knew did not at all exist? Would they not, upon receiving such letters from him, had it been possible for him to write them, have immediately renounced his authority,

SERM. authority, and all regard for him? Is it

VI. possible, that it could be otherwise? Sup-
posing him to have been able, at the first,
by some ways and means, of which we
can have no conception, to have deluded
them, so as to prevail on them to embrace
the Christian faith, and to have bewitched
them by the power of that enthusiasm,
which had intoxicated himself; yet when
he came to speak of miraculous powers,
which they themselves possessed, which
they very well knew, that they did not
possess, must they not have cast him and
his religion off for ever? Or shall we
suppose, that the distraction, which made
him believe these things without any foun-
dation in truth, did likewise possess all these
Christians? That all of them too be-
lieved firmly, and thought, that they saw
miracles of various kinds performed, when
in reality there was no such thing; thought
they themselves performed them; and yet
all mere delusion; imagined, that they
spoke with divers tongues, cast out devils,
healed the sick, when the whole was a
dream? In a word, must we suppose, that
when a man became a Christian, he lost
his senses and understanding; rather, that
the

the utter loss of them was necessary to his SERM.

becoming a Christian : and that among the VI.

great numbers, who were converted to the Christian faith, there were none capable of judging in facts so obvious and plain? This cannot be believed ; and consequently it cannot be believed, that what the Apostle *Paul* wrote, and what his writings suppose him to have done, was all owing to mere enthusiasm, was all the creation of his own fancy, without any reality in it. It may be farther observed,

That this argument will conclude with respect to all Christians whatsoever, as well as to those, amongst whom the Apostle preached the Gospel. We have the greatest reason to believe, that it was received by all Christians as an unquestionable truth, that miracles were worked by the apostles, and by some others, to whom they communicated the extraordinary power, especially such as were employed to preach ; and that this was one great cause of the success of it, and that so many embraced the Christian religion. Now there was no prejudice at all in favour of this religion, to warp their minds, and sway their judgments, and bribe their very senses ; on the

SERM. contrary, there are strong prejudices against VI. it, both amongst *Jews* and *Gentiles*; and it

will be granted by all, that no one, at that time, could become a Christian, but at great hazard to his temporal interest, and even to his life. One would therefore think, that those, who embraced Christianity upon the credit of the miracles, which were worked in confirmation of it, must have been fully satisfied concerning the truth of these extraordinary facts. If they were satisfied by the testimony of their own senses, this was all which they could require or wish. And as for such, as were not eye or ear-witnesses, but received the testimony of those, who had been so, we must suppose, that, in a matter of such importance, they would look carefully into the characters of such as gave testimony in things so extraordinary; and hard, very hard it is to imagine, that a spirit of enthusiasm should so possess men, that multitudes were quite imposed upon, in matters, in which their senses were appealed to, and in which they had an opportunity of using them; and that numbers likewise should believe upon their testimony, unable to discern the distemper under which they

they laboured, or have the least idea of *SERM.*
their being in a state of distraction. VI.

To sum up this argument, when we take a view of the character and writings of the *Apostle Paul*, we see plain appearances of an excellent understanding, and a sober mind. We see a manifest consistency and uniformity in the part, which he acted, and the principles, which he taught. Yet this person, upon supposition, that he sincerely believed himself what he taught the world, and that at the same time there was no truth in it, must be quite out of his senses, and in an enthusiastic phrenzy through the whole of life; imagining he saw, and heard, and did, in a thousand instances, what never existed, but in his own imagination, of which, all these wonderful scenes were the creatures; and that all he said, and apprehended he did, as an apostle of Christ, was owing to mere distraction. Yet he could never have prevailed to the propagating of Christianity in the world, as he did prevail, without gaining credit with men, and persuading them, that what he taught was true, and that he really did, what he pretended to do. Now, with respect to many of his actions,

SERM. the appeal lay to themselves as witnesses,

VI. and to their own senses. So that he must not only himself have been deprived of his senses by enthusiasm, but all his converts must have been equally deprived of theirs, and have laboured under an enthusiasm just of the same species with his. Yet this enthusiasm of his was such, as admitted his taking in a scheme of religion, consistent with itself in every thing, and exactly agreeable to a plan, consisting of a very great variety of parts, which was taught by other men, in other parts of the world, with the leaders of whom he had no concert. Can a man of a sober mind believe all this? How much more probable is the account, which he giveth himself, that he received his gospel *by revelation from Jesus Christ*; and that by him he was endowed with the power of doing those wondrous works, by which he gained credit in the world?

Can any man say, that such instruction by revelation is impossible? Or that there is an impossibility in a mortal's being endowed with a power of working miracles? Here is a fact alleged, to which we must either give our assent, or fall into very great

great absurdities. All that we can say, is, SERM. that these are wonderful things; but if the VI. facts are well attested, are we to reject them merely because they are wonderful?

To conclude these discourses concerning the *Apostle Paul*; it is evident, that his character is a very extraordinary one, and deserveth to be very particularly considered and attended to; for it affordeth very strong arguments for the truth of Christianity. Will any one assert, and stand by it, as a matter, in which his mind is satisfied, that there never was such a person; that there is no truth in the stories of his being converted from Judaism to Christianity, and of his travelling through so many parts of the world to preach mankind that religion; that there were no such societies of Christians, as were said to have been founded by him, and that there were no such epistles written by him to them; but that all these things are intirely the inventions of after times? In reality this is such a stretch, and so inconsistent with all regard to history, that no person of common sense and candor can be supposed capable of it. But if these things are true, that there was
such

SERM. such a person employed in the propagation

VI. of Christianity, in the world; that he had
 such success; that he founded many churches, and wrote those epistles to them, which now go under his name; then if there was no truth in the religion of Christ, nor any divine authority for it, either he knew this, and acted the wicked part of an impostor, or he himself believed what he taught, but was by mere enthusiasm led into all these fancies. Upon the one or the other of these the adversaries of Christianity must fix. But in good earnest, can any man with satisfaction to his mind rest in either, when he considereth how they are loaded with absurdities?

As a great part of the world hath been long in possession of the religion of Christ, and hath received it as of divine authority, upon evidence of facts, which appeareth to be very clear and strong; the advocates for that religion might reasonably expect a substantial answer to that evidence, and that the insufficiency of it should be clearly shewed. Particularly, in the present case, it might be expected, that they should shew, that all, which the friends of Christianity have offered from the life and character of the

Apostle

Apostle Paul, might be well accounted for SERM.
on the foot of imposture or enthusiasm. VI.

This is the proper and natural way of arguing. And it is putting an hardship upon the apologists for Christianity, to oblige them to shew, that it is impossible, that either imposture or enthusiasm can account for these extraordinary things. Yet this happeneth not to be a very difficult task ; and although it may be hard to say, what the cunning of imposture, or the fire of enthusiasm, may do in matters of religion ; yet we may easily see, that there are some effects, which cannot be ascribed to either of them, as the cause ; and such the gospel preached by the *Apostle Paul* most certainly is.

That objections and difficulties arise, in considering this subject, which, by men of acuteness have been strongly urged ; and particularly, that the doctrine of miracles and of inspiration doth not at all suit with what appeareth to us concerning the government of the world, and that we now see no miracles, and have no reason to expect, that ever we shall see any thing of that nature : all this, I say, is no reason, why we should not believe a fact, of which

we

SERM. we have good evidence. In this affair, we

VI. should judge just in the same manner, as
all wise men judge concerning the appearances in nature, and the effects, which we see produced. To depend upon systems, and hypotheses, and preconceived opinions, to direct us in our judgments concerning them, and to pronounce, perhaps, that there can be no such effects, because they contradict the principles, which we have espoused, is very bad philosophy ; and by all men, who desire to attain to true knowledge, justly discarded. We are to attend to experiments and facts, to guide our reasonings by them, and bring all our theories into a consistence with them ; rather indeed take all our theories from them. This is the only way of attaining to substantial knowledge in the works of nature. Just so ought we to conduct ourselves, with respect to the miracles recorded in scripture. The question is, whether there really were such facts, and whether we have sufficient evidence of them ? If we have, we are no more to attend to theories, and speculations, with which we cannot reconcile them ; but to receive, and reason upon them, just as we would upon any fact or experiment,

experiment, of which natural history in-

SERM.

formeth us with sufficient evidence, or

VI.

which we have seen with our eyes. The
question to a man of wisdom and candour
will be, not how such facts will affect his
preconceptions, and the opinions, which
he hath received as just ; but whether the
thing is really fact or not ? When he is
convinced it is, then he is to deduce con-
sequences from it, for the enlargement of
his knowledge, and the conduct of his
life. Thus, when the matter is once fully
determined in the mind, that there is suf-
ficient evidence for believing what the scrip-
tures have recorded concerning Jesus Christ
and his apostles, and what they did and
taught ; here the mind must rest, and men
are to make the best improvements they
can of the advantages, which they enjoy
by the religion of Christ, to the purposes
of their salvation and happiness.

But the great thing necessary, in matters
of so much importance to mankind, and
every individual, as those of religion, is,
if possible, to come to a clear decision as
the result of diligent and impartial inquiry,
in which the mind may rest in tranquillity.
Where a judgment may be formed, and

men

SERM. men can, by careful attention and deliberation,

VI. come to a conclusion, in which they may be fixed with full satisfaction; in this

case, not to labour for such satisfaction, is most inexcusable indolence. With respect to the present argument, taken from the character, life, and writings, of the Apostle *Paul*; for a person (who hath got his mind full of objections against revelation and inspiration, and miracles) to say, that he doth not think himself obliged to account for it, how the world came to believe this man, and receive his doctrine, or how he came to preach it; and that he is not concerned, whether he was an impostor or an enthusiast, is a very unreasonable way of thinking, and unworthy of a candid mind. If, indeed, it could be fully and clearly demonstrated, that it is impossible, that these things should be true, there would be an end of Christianity at once, and of all its pretences. But for aught, which hath yet appeared in the world, no such thing hath been demonstrated; but objections and difficulties have been started, and urged with great vehemence, which, all of them put together, will never overthrow the evidences, or destroy the credit of the Christian

rian religion. However, the subject of this SERM.

VI.

discourse is a matter, which lieth in a narrow compass; and in which, at this day, we have an opportunity of obtaining, by fair reasoning, a good measure of; I may venture to say, full satisfaction. The appearance, which the Apostle made in the world, the reception, which he met with, and the success, with which he preached the gospel, are effects, of which there must have been a cause. Either truth lay at the foundation, and he acted by divine authority, or not. If he did not, then it was evident, that he taught what he knew was false, and so was an impostor; or that he taught what he himself believed, but without any foundation in truth, and so was an enthusiast. It is impossible to assign any other cause. Now let the adversaries to revelation and Christianity choose one or other of these hypotheses. If they shall affirm, that the Apostle was an impostor, it is but a fair demand, that they should attend carefully to the reasonings against this; and try, all arguments and circumstances being laid together, whether they can rest in it, and stand by it, and say with candor, that they see no good reason, why he might

SERM. might not be an impostor. But if this will VI. not do, and the supposition seemeth to be loaded with absurdity, then let it be considered, whether the life and character of this wonderous man can be accounted for by mere enthusiasm? If after what hath been advanced by Christian writers upon this subject, hath been deliberately and candidly weighed, they can believe, that this is the truth; and that they can account for all things, which have been laid before them, from mere distraction and phrenzy, it is well: but if they cannot so believe, what remaineth, but that they must acknowledge, that the Apostle spoke the words of truth and soberness? That men should thus try, and come to a fixed decision in their own minds, is certainly a very equitable demand. It is what they owe to their Maker, who hath endowed them with the powers of reason for directing their conduct; it is what they owe to themselves; it is what they owe to the world. There is really nothing in this matter, which is perplexed or puzzling; the judgment may be as easily formed *now*, as it could have been at any time since the apostolic age. It relieth upon nothing from

from antiquity; but that there was such a **SERM.**
person, who went through the world as a **IV.**
preacher and an apostle of Christ; that he
founded certain Christian churches, and
wrote such epistles to them, which, it is
apprehended, will not be denied; and as
the argument is clear and easy now, so it
will be to the end of time; an argument,
with respect to which, it doth not require
literature, but only a plain good sense, to
come to a satisfactory decision.

S E R-

S E R M O N VII.

Observations upon the Apostle Paul's
description of the Man of Sin.

2 THESSAL. ii. 3 — 13.

*Let no man deceive you by any means,
for that day shall not come, ex-
cept there come a falling away
first, and that Man of Sin be re-
vealed, the son of perdition ; who
opposeth and exalteth himself above
all, that is called God, or is wor-
shipped : so that he, as God,
sitteth in the temple of God, shew-
ing himself, that he is God. Re-
member ye not, that when I was
yet with you, I told you these
things ? And now ye know what
with-holdeth, that he might be re-
vealed in his time. For the mys-
tery of iniquity doth already work,
only*

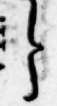
only be, who now letteth, will let,
until be be taken out of the way.

And then shall that wicked one be
revealed, whom the Lord shall con-
sume by the spirit of his mouth,
and destroy by the brightness of his
coming: even him, whose coming
is after the working of Satan,
with all power, and signs, and lying
wonders; and with all deceivable-
ness of unrighteousness in them
that perish, because they received
not the love of the truth, that
they might be saved. And for
this cause God shall send them
strong delusions, that they should
believe a lie; that they all might
be damned, who believed not the
truth, but had pleasure in un-
righteousness.


IT hath, in some past discourses, been SERM.
several times taken notice of, as a VII.

strong presumption of the truth and
divine authority of our holy religion, that
in the writings of the New Testament we
meet

SERM. meet with many things, which seem to be

VII.  quite above human invention, and especially above any thing, that could be reasonably expected from the disciples of our Lord, who had not the advantages of a liberal education, and were strangers to literature. The Apostle *Paul* was, indeed, in this respect, very different from the other apostles: he was liberally educated, of which we see the plain traces of his writings; and he appeareth to have been a man of genius and eloquence, and reasoneth with great exactness. Our adversaries, therefore, may possibly plead, that we are not to wonder at it, if, in his writings, we meet with much of invention, and with strains superior to what we find in the writings of persons of low education, and illiterate. But the passage I have now read to you is of such a nature, as to render it extremely difficult to resolve it into any power of human invention; and for this reason I offer it to your consideration in the present discourse, as a presumptive argument of the truth of Christianity.

Here a very extraordinary character is brought before the reader; a person described as sitting in the temple of God, who

who was to be very conspicuous in the SERM. VII. 

world, possessed of great power; and his features, which are most hateful, particularly delineated; a person, who was to continue in this state, till the Lord should consume him by the spirit of his mouth, and destroy him by the brightness of his coming.

The reader will immediately ask, What can this mean? Whence had this author the idea of such an extraordinary character, which is not like any thing, that ever had appeared in the world; which the history of mankind, before the times in which the Apostle wrote, not only doth not parallel, but maketh mention of no power, which beareth the least resemblance of it. Let us attend particularly to this character, and consider, how it could be suggested to the author's mind.

This amazing person, the apostle calls the *man of sin*, and *son of perdition*; phrases, which immediately raise, in the reader's mind, aversion and abhorrence, as of the very worst character; and the using such terms sheweth, that the author laboureth to represent it as such. A *man of sin*, a person, whose wickedness was so great, so much above that of others, as to be-

SERM. come his peculiar distinction; a person
 VII. utterly abandoned to evil. And the *son of*
perdition. This denomination our Blessed

Lord gave to *Judas*, who betrayed him, and who, in doing so, all circumstances considered, appeareth to have contracted the greatest guilt, and he subjected his name to the greatest infamy. It is here given to the Man of Sin, who was to be a destroyer of multitudes of mankind, and was himself doomed to destruction.

This person is said to oppose and exalt himself above all, which is called God, or is worshipped; above all powers and magistrates upon earth. These are in scripture called gods, as they are clothed with dominion and authority over others, in which they bear a faint resemblance of that power, that ruleth over all. *I said, speaking of judges and magistrates, that you are gods, and all of you children of the most high; but we shall die like men, and fall as one of the princes.* To those gods on earth, the Man of Sin opposeth himself; and not only refuseth all submission to them, but exalteth himself above them; and above all that is worshipped, the very highest orders and ranks of mankind. This sheweth;

sheweth, that the Man of Sin was to be SERM.
VII.

and that he was to claim universal subjection and obedience. But it ought to be particularly attended to, that this person is represented as sitting in the *temple of God*, the temple of the true God. That this should be meant of the temple in *Jerusalem*, no one will imagine: that structure was very soon to be destroyed, and was actually destroyed, without any such person's appearing in it, as the author here describeth. But we see, that, in the New Testament, Christians are spoken of as the temple of God, and the Christian church as the house of God; and his temple; and it cannot be doubted, that it is the Christian church, which is here intended. This great power, then, was to set up and establish itself in the church of Christ; the *man of sin* sitting in it as God, and shewing himself, that he is God; putting on the greatest appearance, and making ostentation of the highest power, and of supreme authority. This may be understood to signify, that he acteth as a temporal prince and supreme magistrate; for, as hath been observed, the word God will bear this figurative

sense.

SERM. sense. But when he is represented as sitting VII. in the *temple of God, as God*, and shewing himself, that he is *God*, the reader will probably be inclined to think, that it signifies much more, even his assuming to himself powers, which can belong to no mortal, and an authority really divine.

In the seventh verse, this amazing scene, agreeably to the other parts of the description, is called a *mystery of iniquity*. The arts, by which this Son of Perdition exalteth himself, are all darkness and unrighteousness; the great end, which he aimeth at, is concealed, and the methods, which he useth in pursuance of it, are such as will not bear the light. And as the foundations were to be laid in darkness, so the superstructure was to be raised by slow degrees. The appearance of such a person on a sudden, openly claiming such powers, must have so alarmed the Christian Church, while unprepared for it, as to raise an opposition, which would, in all probability, have rendered the attempts of the Man of Sin vain and fruitless. His approaches, therefore, towards the summit, at which he aimed, must be gradual, and, in a great measure, imperceptible to the

the world about him. The apostle tells SERM.
VII.

ready working ; it was beginning in some disguised-tendencies, to power and domination in the Christian church. But this progress of it at that time was retarded by some power, that was a *let* to it. What this was, the apostle doth not say. It was a power, which was to be taken out of the way ; but at that time it effectually hindered the mystery of iniquity from working, with any considerable success. A power, therefore, probably, by which the state of the Christian church was so affected, that no one had an opportunity of setting himself up in it, as invested with the authority, which this person was to claim and actually to exercise.

He is farther described in the ninth verse ; then *shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy by the brightness of his coming ; even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and dying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish.* He could not establish his throne, nor maintain the authority, which, as a

SERM. God, he claimeth, without taking advantage of the credulity, and weakness, and

VII.

corrupt lusts of mankind, and by means of these betraying them to their own destruction. His coming is after the working of satan, with all power, and signs; it is in a way, which could become only that wicked agent, from whom the Man of Sin will receive all the aid, which he can give him, exerting whatsoever power he hath in forwarding the mystery of iniquity, and to bring the wicked work to perfection. He will come with signs and lying wonders, deluding men with false appearances of miraculous power, by which their minds should be dazzled and confounded, and they brought to believe in him. He will impudently pretend to the same credentials of his mission and authority, by which the religion of Christ was propagated and supported; and persuade the world by his arts, that the power of God is with him; by this means begetting in the superstitious and undiscerning a persuasion, that his pretensions are just. And he will come with all deceitfulness, of unrighteousness, or unrighteous deceptions; with all possible fraudulent arts, and all imaginable

imaginable false colours, by which he may SERM.

VII.

are calculated for indulging the lusts of those, who are not disposed to receive the truth in the love of it, and are enemies to sincere religion. His business is to persuade them to believe lies; and undoubtedly these lies are to be so framed as will be most agreeable to a corrupted state of the mind. Such arts were not like to fail of success, when applied to persons, who had not simplicity and sincerity of spirit; but were under the power of the lusts of this world, and so might be ready to embrace any thing as religion, by which they might be excused from the practice of true religion, and made easy in making provision for the flesh, to *fulfil the desires of it*. No wonder, that, a spirit of delusion thoroughly possessing them, such should become the means and instruments of establishing this hellish power, and of bringing the Christian world into subjection to the yoke. While Christians retained their purity of heart and manners, by which the mind is most happily prepared for discerning and embracing truth, and defended from all pernicious error, the Man of Sin could not

SERM. not have succeeded in his impious attempts.

VII. A pure heart not only could not have given encouragement to his grossly wicked devices, but must have been at the greatest enmity with them. So the morals of the Christian world must be supposed to have been corrupted greatly, before the Son of Perdition could establish his empire over it. And accordingly the Apostle taketh notice, that there must be *a falling away first*, a great apostasy from the truth and purity of the Christian religion, and then, as a state of things fit for his purpose, this wicked one should be revealed, and compleat that begun apostasy, which made way for him.


Now such are the features of this Man of Sin; they are delineated very strongly and distinctly. And it appeareth, that the Christians at that time were in assured expectation of the coming of this wicked person. The Apostle mentioneth it, as a matter, with which he had before acquainted the *Thessalonians*; and the Apostle *John*, 1 Epist. ii. 18. of an *Antichrist*, which Christians had heard should come: And there is great reason to believe, that this was the very same with the Man of Sin,

Sin, whom, as we have seen, the Apostle SERM.

Paul doth so particularly describe. And VII.

any one, who will look into the visions of *St. John*, in the Revelation, and consider what is said concerning that amazing power, which is represented under the image of a beast, attended with a false prophet, that worked miracles before him, by which he deceived them, that had received the mark of the beast, and worshipped his image; and concerning the great power of this beast, that he causeth all, both great and small, both rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their forehead; and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name; what he says, again, concerning the woman, which he saw sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, which had seven heads and ten horns; pointing out by the heads seven mountains, upon which the woman sitteth; and by the horns ten kings, or forms of government; and expressly saying, that by the woman was meant that great city, which ruleth over the kings of the earth; and that this woman hath a golden cup in
her

SERM. her hand, full of abomination and filthi-

VII.  nefs of her fornication, and that the inhabitants of the world had been made drunk with the wine of her fornication : I say, whosoever considereth these visions of St. *John*, with attention, will see reason to think, that they refer to the very same scene, which the Apostle *Paul* more plainly describeth. To go through the particulars of these visions was no part of my purpose at present : many authors of great name, and some very lately, have endeavoured, not without good success, to point out the meaning of them ; but no one can read them with care, but must see, that they were intended to represent some power, which should spring up in the world most unfriendly to the religion of Christ, a power, which should wonderfully prevail, and be in a manner irresistible, but which should at last be destroyed, so as never to be heard of any more. And it is scarcely to be doubted, that this power is the same with the Man of Sin, and Son of Perdition. And this will appear the more probable, when it is considered, that the Man of Sin doth not mean one single person or individual only ; for it is a political person, which

which is intended ; a certain power or government, that may be held for many generations, by numbers of individuals succeeding one another. And this every one, who is acquainted with it, knows is very agreeable to the scriptural language. Nor

VII.

is it at all likely, that any individual person, springing up in the Christian church, should in his own life-time have been capable of completing such a scene of empire and dominion, as is here described. The mystery may be well supposed to be long in working, and require a considerable length of time in bringing it to perfection. Any single person, exalting himself on a sudden in this manner, and before the world was, by long practising upon it, prepared for his appearance, would in all probability have been soon overthrown. Upon the whole, it is incontestable, that here is a power described, exalting itself above all other powers on earth ; a power, which, tho' seated in the temple of God, that is, in the Christian church, yet is most wicked and most destructive of the souls of men ; raised and established by the most fraudulent and wicked methods ; and doomed to destruction by a signal interposition of him,

SAM. him, whose authority hath been so im-
 VII. piously usurped.

Now the question is, how such a character as this should come into the author's imagination? What could suggest it to him? Nothing, that had ever appeared in the world, was any thing like it. No king, or kingdom, which we meet with in the history of mankind, had any such appearances as these, or from which such a description could be taken. Nor are there any intimations in antiquity, which could lead one to the forming of such a character, unless what we find in the prophecies of *Daniel* might be supposed to give the hint; but if this is alleged to be the case, the present argument will not lose any force, but be strengthened by it. And what could bring it into any man's mind, that the church of Christ, founded upon that faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for, and expressly renouncing the spirit of this world; that church, in which all temporal views and interests, all worldly power and dominion, may be said to have been quite out of sight: who could have imagined, I say, that it should give being to such a monstrous

monstrous person or power, so dreadfully SERM.
wicked and destructive? Indeed having VII.

got this conception, not to be accounted for by the ordinary powers and operations of the human mind, the Apostle might, by his own sagacity, be naturally led to perceive the workings of the mystery of iniquity, even at the time when he wrote this epistle, and accordingly taketh notice of them. But could any man by mere human prudence, from the state of things at that time, and any appearances in the Christian church, have formed the idea of such a power and dominion as is here described, set in direct opposition to all that is good, prevailing so as to exalt itself above all others, and continuing till a signal interposition from God himself should overthrow it?

Let us try, whether the world had produced any thing like this. Surely none of the Pagan powers bore the least resemblance of it. Many of them persecuted the church of the true God with great cruelty; the *Jews* suffered deeply by them in many different ages, and upon some occasions were well nigh exterminated: and in the fancy of the Christian church, all the

powers

SERM. powers on earth were against it. But none
VII. of these bear any resemblance of the Man
of Sin. They attacked the church by
open and cruel persecution; they came not
with signs and lying wonders, but with
the sword. They did not endeavour to
persuade men by delusive arts, but forced
them to a compliance. But what relation
had any of them, who lived in the Apostle's
days, or who came after him, to the
Christian church? to the temple of God?
If some of them affected divine honours,
it was not in the temple of the true God,
that they affected them; nor was their
seat there; and that absurd vanity was no
way like the Apostle's mystery of iniquity.
And for any, who appeared within the
Christian church at or before the time, in
which the Apostle wrote this epistle to the
Thessalonians, was there any of them, from
whom the features of the Man of Sin
could be taken, or to whom they at all
agree? There were heretics, most un-
godly men, who endeavoured to draw dis-
ciples after them. *Simon Magus* is much
spoken of, as the ringleader of these wicked
persons, whose study it was to corrupt the
faith and manners of the Christians. And
the

the *Gnostics* appear, by the accounts we SERM.
have left us of them, to have been numerous. VII.

But it is utterly improbable, that the Apostle *Paul* is in this passage describing such a person as *Simon*; who, if ever he attempted to raise himself to great power, was vigorously opposed by the Christian church, was soon revealed, and soon perished. Nor can it be said of any of the heretics, by which the church was infested in the primitive times, that ever they attained to any resemblance of such power, and influence, as the Apostle hath here pointed out. The Christian church did not submit to these, but was at constant war with them. They never had any such authority or dominion in the temple of God. Besides they were divided into a variety of sects and parties, and there was no bond of union among them, nothing which could be called a central power. And whatever authority any of these heretics might attain to afterwards, they were not at the time, in which the Apostle wrote, nor could possibly be, in a state, which could bear the least resemblance to this description. Whence then had the Apostle such a character?

T

And

And having thus particularly considered the description of the Man of Sin, and shewn, that there had been nothing like it in the world before or in the time of the Apostle, I may leave it to the consideration of those, who are acquainted with the history of the world, and of the church, in the times which came after, whether a power hath not actually appeared in the Christian church, which most fully answerseth to this description. There are some, who think, that the Mahometan dominion doth in the main lines answer to it; and that *Mahomet* was the Man of Sin here described. But if this shall appear to be true, I would observe, that the purpose of the present argument is in effect answered; and those, who deny all revelation, must account for it, how the Apostle should have had the knowledge of such a character so many ages before it existed. But I think it must be owned, that this opinion is liable to some weighty objections. It is known, that whatever use that impostor might make of pretences to divine inspiration, and a power of doing great wonders, yet he did in reality force his way to dominion and empire by the sword, and

and without it, probably, could have had SERM.
no success. Now using the power of the VII.

sword, and the methods of force and violence, is no part of the character of the Man of Sin, as the Apostle hath described him. He might possibly maintain his authority, when once he had got the dominion, in that manner, but it was in a very different manner, that he is represented to have obtained it. The Apostle indeed speaketh of his coming with great power; but that power is after the working of satan, and which shewed itself in signs and lying wonders, which plainly intimated of what kind it was to be. And if he had meant, that he was to conquer the world, and to erect his kingdom, by the force of arms, probably this, which must have been a very remarkable part of the character of the Man of Sin, would have been particularly pointed out. But as there is no mention of this, for the strength, by which he did prevail, is represented as lying in signs and wonders, and the deceivableness of unrighteousness. By these he led the world into his net, and got the great powers in it to support him. Again, in what sense could the mystery of iniquity be said to be

working

SERM. working in his days, if the Apostle meant
VII. by it the Mahometan imposture? Did not

Mabomet, many ages after the apostolic, suddenly spring up, and frame a scheme, which was new, and calculated for raising up a kingdom intirely for himself? An amazing inconsistent mixture of different religions, to which his own wild imagination gave birth; and as he professed himself commissioned of God to introduce a new dispensation, so he forsook the Christian church, and his party are to this day not only separated from it, but at enmity with it, as they must be with all, who refuse to submit to *Mabomet*, or confess him as a prophet sent of God. So that *Mabomet* cannot, in any proper sense, be said to have set himself in the temple of God, that is, in the Christian church. Without doubt, the Man of Sin, in this description, is supposed to retain the Christian profession; for it is in the church he fixeth his throne; it is in it, that he sheweth himself to be God.

But probably another power, which hath grown up in the Christian church, and by which the Christian name and profession have been retained, may offer itself to our thoughts

thoughts upon this occasion ; a power, SERM.
which did not spring up suddenly, but by VII.

slow degrees, and was growing several ages before it arrived to its full strength and maturity ; that is, the spirit of ecclesiastical domination, which proceeded to such amazing lengths, as at the last to possess itself of all those powers, by which the Christian world was oppressed under the Papal dominion : Upon which I shall make some observations, and then leave it to the discerning to judge, whether it does not answer to the description of the Man of Sin.

The pope of *Rome* setteth himself up as the monarch of the Christian world, and did for some ages, almost without controul, exercise the authority over it, to which he pretendeth. He setteth himself in the temple of God, and exalteth himself above all, that is called God and worshipped. In the church he hath established his dominion, and therein exerciseth an absolute power. Whatever is called God, or worshipped, is pronounced inferior, and is to be subjected to him. Magistrates and crowned heads have been his vassals ; he pretendeth to a power, and, in some instances,

SERM. STANCES, to the amazement and terror of
VII. the world, hath actually exerted it, of de-
posing one and setting up another, of giving
kingdoms and taking them away; and
the time hath been when there was no
power to stand before him; when he hath
made the greatest princes tremble and bow,
constrained them to do him homage, and
to undergo very severe and ignominious
penances for their transgressions against
him; as the vicegerent of the Son of
God, pretending, that all the kingdoms of
the earth were given to him, and that he
hath a right to dispose of them. This is
indeed shewing himself, that he is a God;
it is claiming and exercising supreme do-
minion.

But all this may be said to be comparatively little: he pretendeth to power over the consciences of men, which is the particular prerogative of the Supreme Being, and so setteth himself really in the place of God, shewing himself, that he is God. He pretendeth to pronounce men in the favour of God, or out of it, as he seeth cause; to exalt them to heaven, or give them into the power of satan. He pretendeth to a power of remitting sin, or retaining

taining it; of determining what we are to SERM.
believe and what not to believe; nay, to a VII.
power of dispensing with the laws of God,
even in matters of the greatest consequence; and, in a word, to a government untrouled in all matters of conscience and salvation; fixing it as a maxim not to be controverted, that all his decisions are right, and to be respected as the commands of God, and that men are to receive them as such, though they should contradict not only the principles of their reason, but even the testimony of their senses. This is no romantic account of the power, to which he pretendeth, nor any exaggeration of it; a power, which he claimeth as being the sole representative of the Son of God upon earth, and the sole visible head of the church universal. This is in truth to shew himself, that he is in the place of God; it is to exercise divine power and authority, bringing mankind by that impious pretence into the most abject and slavish dependence upon him. Never person pretended to such power before him, nor hath any one appeared besides, to whom the Apostle's description, in the last mentioned part of it, could be properly applied.

SERM. And while the pope could persuade the world, that he was invested with authority even in those matters, which are peculiarly within the divine prerogative, matters of conscience and eternal salvation, it was not to be wondered at, that the deluded world should adore him, and be ready at all times to submit to him; to *him*, who, by the pretended power of canonization, raised whom he thought fit to be objects of worship to all the Christian world.

But to say no more of such profane pretensions to such a divine power, let us see how this authority hath been established and maintained in the world; and in the methods used to that purpose, we shall have another feature of the Man of Sin, *who cometh with signs and lying wonders, and all deceivableness of unrighteousness*. The pretended miracles of the church of Rome have been her strength in every age, and are so still. The greatest of them all, *transubstantiation*, signifying, that the bread and wine, used in the eucharist, are by the words of consecration turned into the real and intire body and blood of our Saviour, is performed by every priest in that church, when he hath an intention to perform it; than which there

there cannot be a greater insult upon the SERM.
very senses of mankind. And for other VII.

miracles of all kinds, how many volumes might be filled with the accounts, which the writers of that church have given us of them? What numbers of saints have been endowed with this power? How many miracles have been performed by their very relics, and at their tombs? In what veneration have these relics been had by the superstitious multitude? And what a gainful thing to the church hath the traffic in them been? In what a particular circumstantial manner are the stories of these miracles told, and with what assurance? This passed extremely well in the dark ages of the world, when this power, which we are speaking of, had with great sagacity in a manner rooted out all true knowledge and learning, and done its utmost for encouraging superstition, the natural fruit of gross ignorance and darkness. But in later and more discerning times, this imposture doth not succeed so well: it hath been often detected, nay, detected by persons, who have been of the same communion; for being of different factions and fraternities in it, and furious in their opposition

SERM. opposition to one another, while one party VII. endeavoured to support the credit of their cause and principles by miracles, the other was as ready to discover to the world the cheats, which were put upon it, and so in some instances the truth, greatly to the reproach of all, hath come to light.

And as to the deccivableness of unrighteousness, what hath been practised of that kind? Particularly in propagating such tenets and opinions, as might soothe and flatter men in their vices, and make their consciences easy in an unrighteous course of life, which are the most pernicious of all deccits. Thus, for instance, how strange the virtue, that hath been ascribed to the sacraments? A virtue to justify men, and put them into a state of favour with God, where no mortal sin puts a bar to their efficacy; though the true religion of Christ ascribeth our justification and acceptance before God only to faith in Jesus Christ, repentance toward God, and real holiness of life. Again, men have been taught to rely upon a participation in the merits of the saints communicated to them by the church; taught to rely upon penances, upon pilgrimages, upon pious donations,

nations, as a kind of atonement for the sins SERM.
of a bad life, and especially upon sacerdotal VII.

absolution : And the auricular confession, very fitly made a part of this superstitious scheme, of what importance and use hath it been to subject and influence mankind to the confessors ? Again, what a mighty influence hath been supposed to be in masses and prayers for the dead, especially as the means of delivering the souls of such as were suffering the pains of purgatory ; and how much dependance upon indulgences ; than which no engines have been better contrived, or more successfully applied, for enriching the church ? And to conclude this head, how have the undiscerning been imposed upon and deluded by the appearances of severity and mortification in the religious orders ? Voluntary poverty, celibacy, and regular obedience, cried up as matters, in which the highest perfection of the Christian life consisted. While under these pretences, the very laws of nature, and the order, which God hath appointed, and the ends of life, which he hath set before men, have been contradicted ; multitudes have been supported in mere idleness, have become an intolerable burden

SERM. burden upon the laity, and engrossed a great part of the wealth of mankind: and these fraternities are indeed a most formidable body, thoroughly engaged in support of the *Romish* superstition, and ready upon all occasions to serve the purposes of the papal tyranny. Thus grievously have mankind been led astray, indulged in their vices, and corrupt lusts strengthened in them; that holy religion, which was intended as the most effectual means of purifying the heart and life, being abused into a protection for the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. All these deceits have a most pernicious tendency to the destruction of the souls of men.

Now when these things are laid together; namely, the power and authority, which the pope of *Rome* hath assumed to himself over all the Christian world, the use, which he hath made of signs and lying wonders, and of most unrighteous deceits, to impose upon mankind and draw them into his net; together with the direct opposition of the whole scheme of his superstition to the true spirit and tendency of the religion of Christ, I leave it to the attentive and discerning to judge, whether the papal

papal hierarchy doth not answer the Apostle's SERM. description of the Man of Sin ; whether VII.

the features do not exactly agree. And if it is plain they do, then it remains to be considered, how such a character could be suggested to the Apostle's mind. It hath been already observed, that nothing had appeared in the world before or in the times of the Apostle, that was any thing like it. And to this let me add, that, in his days, there was not the least appearance, that things in the Christian world should take such a turn, as to make way for setting up this amazing dominion in the church, and over the whole world. What foresight of man could reach to the knowledge of such a total alteration in civil affairs several hundreds of years before it came to pass? A change, which depended upon such innumerable contingencies, and to which such a variety of causes must contribute? What human prudence or knowledge, in the Apostle's days, when Christianity was in a state of grievous persecution by all the powers on earth, could have certainly foreseen church officers highly dignified with power, riches, and titles? Could have foreseen the *Roman* empire dismembred, and

SEAM. and falling so into pieces, as to give opportunity for the bishop of Rome's erecting his throne? Could he have foreseen his getting *Rome* and *Italy* into his hand, and acting as a secular prince? Could he have foreseen him extending his power over all *Europe*, and lording it over the greatest princes?

Again, who could have imagined, what mere human prudence could have foreseen, that such a religion as that of Christ, so intirely abstracted from this world, so utterly opposite to the genius of it, could ever be so transformed as to answer the purposes of the worldly spirit in the most effectual manner; and that so changed from the original purity and simplicity of it, that scarcely any one of its true features were left, it should still by means of the delusions put upon mankind obtain in the world; and that men should combine in acting, as if they meant to banish all sound knowledge, and give themselves up intirely to ignorance and superstition? Who could have foreseen, that all ranks and degrees of men would submit to the most ignoble servitude, even that, in which the understanding and conscience are utterly enslaved,

slaved, or consent to it so universally, that SERM.
VII.

they should no longer see with their own eyes, believe their senses, or trust to their own judgments? Yet all this we have seen come to pass, and all this was necessary before the papal hierarchy could come to the perfection of its power. And if that hierarchy doth so exactly answer to the description of the Man of Sin, that, now it hath appeared in the world, we see every feature of him in it, how shall we account for the knowledge, which the Apostle had of it? Is there any possible way, besides ascribing it to the inspiration of the Almighty?

However, the Son of Perdition, the Apostle tells us, is to be consumed by the *spirit of the mouth of the Lord, and destroyed by the brightness of his coming.* A kingdom of such a nature as his, raised and established upon the ruins of the reason of mankind, and of their virtue and sciences, is fitly doomed to destruction. He, who *sitteth in the circle of the heavens,* will one day overthrow it. What is precisely meant by the spirit of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming, it is not necessary we should determine. It may

SERM. signify such a diffusion of light and truth
VII. through the world, as that all the darkness

and superstition and delusion, in which the strength of the Man of Sin doth lie, shall flee before it; and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas. And, surely, if light shall so prevail, and the true Christian spirit along with it, as there must be an end to the reign of that great wicked man in the temple of God, so the Christian church, enriched and adorned with holiness and charity, shall become a fit habitation for God. But whatever particular interposition may be here intended, we may rest satisfied, that wickedness in this high place shall be finally overthrown.

I cannot conclude this discourse, without making the following reflections.

First, we see how the corrupt lusts of mankind will deprave and poison whatsoever cometh under the influence of them. What more pure than the religion of Jesus as it is contained in the New Testament? What more healthful to the souls of men? What could be more happily adapted to conduct them to perfection? Yet even this, the wisdom, the spirit, and the lusts of this world, have so corrupted, so changed from

from its original purity and simplicity, that *SERM.*
as it appeared in the church of *Rome* before *VII.*

the reformation, scarcely a feature of it would be known: it was made an engine to serve the bad purposes and temporal interests of wicked men; and indeed became a means of pressing the consciences of mankind into that service, without which it could not have been effectually carried on; for nothing could have enslaved men in such a manner as they have been enslaved, but the bringing their consciences first under the yoke. But, I say, in what a light does this set the corruption of mankind, and the power of worldly lusts? The antichristian tyranny was indeed raised and established by degrees; and it may be observed, concerning the Man of Sin, the political person, whom I have been describing, as it hath been concerning individual persons of bad characters, that no one becometh all at once very wicked and abandoned. To have attempted to raise up such a kingdom of darkness all at once, would have been too shocking, and what mankind could not have born. The progress, from the first beginnings of it to its perfection of spiritual and temporal power and glory, was slow and gradual. But yet such advances

SERM. vances, as were made, could never be intended, or the design executed, but by VII. men of bad spirits; and who well knew what kind of mark they were aiming at, and the prize they were contending for. And, in truth, many, who sat in that antichristian chair, and especially those, to whom principally it was owing, that the authority of it was carried to such a height, as to *cause its terror in the land of the living*, were, if we may depend upon the testimony of their own historians, men of most abandoned characters, a reproach to human nature as well as to the true religion of Christ.

Secondly, it may be observed, that mankind could never have been so inflamed and tyrannized over, if they had not made a sacrifice of their own reason, and their right of judging for themselves, to ecclesiastical authority. To this the mischief was in a great measure, I may say, wholly, owing. When once men had renounced their own reason and judgment, and given themselves up blindfold to be conducted by others, who were corrupt and designing men, one cannot wonder, that the very grossest imposition obtained. But had they maintained

maintained a resolution of seeing with their SERM.
own eyes, all this must have been prevent- VII. }

ed. What a melancholy thing to think, that men should receive, as articles of faith, the grossest absurdities ! That they should suffer themselves to be led quite astray from the true paths of religion and virtue to mere vanity and folly, to most insignificant, and many of them ridiculous, rites and forms, substituted in the room of these ! That princes and great men should espouse such a cause, and become the executioners of the decrees of the church, to the ruin of their own subjects, and filling the world about them with blood and slaughter ! Destroying and devouring without end, and having the ferocity and cruelty, which might be natural to some of them, greatly increased by religious zeal, or rather religious phrenzy, which was indeed enough to beget such cruelty of disposition, where it had originally no place in the temper ! Dreadful case, that mankind should be so deluded ! How weak a thing is superstition ! However all was owing originally to men's giving up their own reason, and judgment, and senses, and refusing, perhaps I should rather say,

SERM. not daring, to make the best of the under-
VII. standings, which God had given them,
and the best of their bibles for the direction of their own conduct, in matters of the highest concern to every individual.

Thirdly, as we clearly discern what is the foundation of all this intolerable servitude, we may see plainly what the true method of preventing it is, and by what means the tyranny, which hath imposed it, must at last be overthrown. Let men, each for himself, inquire with sincerity and diligence into the will of God concerning him; attend carefully to the voice of reason; search the holy scriptures with an unbiaſſed mind, and follow the decisions of his own conscience, which God hath planted in every man, as a witness for himself and for truth, and hath left free from all human authority. There needeth no more, but the universal prevalence of this spirit, to sap the foundations of the antichristian kingdom, and all spiritual tyranny whatsoever. The word of God we have in our hands, the sacred unalterable records of the religion of Christ, a most inestimable treasure. Let us acquaint ourselves thoroughly with these, and

and always cleave to the truth, as we have SERM.
learned it from Christ ; not doubting to

VII.

depart from any human decisions, which we discern to be contrary to it. Cleaving to truth, without any regard to the consequences of our doing so, however inconvenient to ourselves. This, we are sure, can never lead us astray ; it can never hurt the religion of Christ ; it can never hurt our own most valuable interests. It is what becomes us, as creatures endowed with reason ; it becometh us as Christians, so to inquire and judge for ourselves, and it is the sure foundation, upon which we stand as Protestants. Had the right of private judgment been always asserted and maintained, *Antichrist* could never have been ; and when that sacred right cometh to be universally asserted, and men follow the voice of their own reason and consciences, *Antichrist* can be no more. And as sincerity, in inquiring into and doing the will of God concerning us, will be always pleasing to our reflecting thoughts, so it will give us *boldness in the day of judgment.*

S E R M O N V I I I .

The Apostle *John*'s character and writings considered.

JOHN XXI. 24.

This is the disciple, which testifieth these things, and wrote these things, and we know, that his testimony is true.

SERM. VIII. **I** PROPOSE, in this discourse, to make some observations upon the character and writings of the Apostle *John*.

He is called the disciple, whom Jesus loved. Our Blessed Lord had an extraordinary degree of affection for him, and lived in a peculiar intimacy with him. Upon some remarkable occasions, when our Saviour retired from his followers, *John* and one or two more were admitted to

to attend him ; as we find in the history SERM.

VIII.

of the transfiguration, and when he was in those distressful agonies of spirit, which he suffered before he became a prisoner to the Jews. In the account given us of the last supper, this Apostle is said to have leaned on *Jesus's* bosom ; that is, according to the posture at table, which was then used, he was next to him ; and when our Lord spake of being betrayed by one of them, who were his disciples, and who that very time sat at table with him, *Peter* beckoned to *John* (probably as the person, who had the greatest intimacy, and was the properest to put such a question to him) to ask, who this should be ? He appeareth, indeed, to have been fit to be an intimate friend of our Saviour ; for he had very much of his spirit in him, a spirit of devotion, of purity, and love : these, especially the last, are very signal in his character, and run through all his writings.

In discoursing upon this subject, I shall, in the first place, shew, that the religion of Christ, as *John* hath represented it, is very worthy of such a teacher sent of God : Secondly, I shall make some remarks upon the simplicity and artless manner, in which

SERM. he writeth: and, in the third place, lay VIII. before you what is to be collected from these things in favour of Christianity, and shew, how highly probable it appeareth, that he wrote what he himself believed and had learned from Christ.

First, I am to shew, that the religion of Christ, as the Apostle *John* hath represented it, is worthy of such a teacher sent of God. Every one, who hath considered religion with any attention and care, must see, that the religion of our nature consisteth in the fear and love of God, in the love of mankind, in temperance and purity of manners, and in a constant desire after moral rectitude and perfection. This religion of nature may be truly said to be unalterable; and must be materially the same in all the subjects of God's moral kingdom, of whatsoever order and rank. It hath unquestionably God for its author, who hath written his laws upon the heart of man. And if mankind are taught a religion, by revelation from heaven (which in a dark and corrupted state of the world might be of the greatest possible use, and a most gracious interposition in their favour) these must be the great things of it. Now, if

if we attentively peruse the epistles of St. *John*, we shall see, that those are the matters, which he insisteth upon throughout them, together with faith in Jesus Christ, which is the great means of begetting and maintaining in men the true Christian temper. And as the love of God and of mankind, righteousness and purity of life, are in nature inseparably connected; so this author clearly teacheth this connection, and sheweth manifestly the vanity of pretending to the love of God, where there is not that of our brethren; or to the true love of our brethren, where there is not the love of God; or to either, without righteousness and holiness of life. And these subjects, as they may be said naturally to run into one another, so they are promiscuously treated by the author, without any attention to strict method, and as things were suggested to his mind.

As no one can, in stronger terms, express the goodness and love of God to the children of men, (in doing which he always appeareth to labour under the greatness of the subject, as in chap. iii. 1. *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons*

SERM. sons of God! and chap. iv. 10. *Herein is*

VIII. *love, not that we loved God, but that he loved*

us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for

our sins! and ver. 16. *And we have known*

and believed the love, that God hath to us;

God is love, and he that dwelleth in love,

dwelleth in God, and God in him;) so like-

wise he representeth this original perfect

love, as a pattern for our imitation. * *Be-*

loved, if God so loved us, we ought also to

love one another. And, † *hereby perceive*

we the love of God, because he laid down his

life for us, and we ought to lay down our

lives for the brethren. At the same time

shewing us, that if we do not love our

brethren, we cannot be supposed to love

God, or to be like him. § *Beloved, let us*

love one another; for love is of God, and

every one, that loveth, is born of God and

knoweth God: he, that loveth not, knoweth

not God, for God is love. Such a way of

speaking becometh a person, who was a

teacher of that religion, the declared end

of which is charity, out of a pure heart,

out of a good conscience, and faith un-

feigned; and sheweth that largeness, li-

* 1 John iv. 11. † Ib. iii. 16. § Ib. iv. 7.

berality,

berality, warmth, and disinterestedness of SERM.

heart, which are the glory of human na- VIII.

ture, in a light the noblest and most engaging; as being the fairest resemblance of divinity, and the distinguishing characters of such as are born of God. And in these strains we discover the true temper and character of the author; who, if we may form a judgment from his writings, was full of love and kind affection. We see that spirit very remarkable in the gospel, as well as epistles of this Apostle. He hath preserved more of our Saviour's discourses, both with friends and enemies, than any other of the Evangelists; and the kindness and love, which reigned in his great master, so suitable to his own genius, is very particularly pointed out. He speaketh of love, as peculiarly our Blessed Saviour's commandment; and in his own words, calleth it his * *new commandment*, that by which all men should know his disciples, as being absolutely essential to their character. And he hath collected those passages in the life of our Lord, which most affectingly display the goodness and tenderness of his heart. He sheweth him

* John xiii. 34.

weeping

SERM. weeping over the grave of *Lazarus*, in

VIII. sympathy with the friends and relations of

that good man. He sheweth him washing the feet of his disciples, as the most significant and expressive way he could teach them, that they ought to love one another, and account no offices too low, or unworthy of them, by which they had an opportunity of serving their brethren. This author hath likewise preserved our Saviour's last discourses with his disciples, and his prayer to the Father on their behalf; in which we see the most moving tenderness, and, at the same time, our Lord appearing in all the glory of such a good and great mind, as became the Son of God. And in the account, which this Apostle giveth us of the passages, which followed our Lord's resurrection, he hath particularly related some, which shew the same affection and tenderness towards his disciples, that he so frequently expressed while he lived with them. * *Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my father and your father, to my God and your God.* And how condescending was he to the doubts and incredulity of *Thomas*! How worthy of him

* John xx. 17.

the

the grace, with which he taketh such particular notice of *Peter*, who probably had not yet recovered from the confusion, in which he must have been for having denied his master, in a manner so inexcusable? These instances make manifest the spirit of our Blessed Lord; and the love, which reigned in the heart of this excellent man, who was the beloved disciple, must have given him peculiar pleasure in recounting and preserving them upon record, with a view, doubtless, of begetting the same blessed temper in all believers.

With respect to the love of God, the subject of the first and great commandment, this author hath taught us to know it by the fruit of it; namely, loving our brethren and doing them good, and keeping the commandments of God. This he inculcateth frequently, and with an earnestness suitable to the importance of it.

* *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.* † *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.* Again, † *Who so hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother suffer need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him,*

* 1 John iv. 12.

† Ib. 20.

† Ib. iii. 17.

how

SERM. how dwelleth the love of God in him?

VIII. * *Whoever believeth, that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God; and he, who loveth him that begat, loveth him also, that is begotten of him.* All this is sound reason and nature. For surely the love of God, which maketh men like God, and formeth them after the image of his goodness, must be attended with the kindest affections, and cannot consist with a narrow and selfish, much less with a malicious spirit.

But the Apostle insisteth upon universal obedience, and our keeping all the commandments of God, as what only is a substantial evidence of our love to him; and very justly; for certainly, if we really love God, we shall be disposed to please him, and do his will in all things; nor can any thing be more absurd and inconsistent than professions of love to him, while men voluntarily and deliberately rebel against him, do dishonour to his name by presumptuous sin, and shew, that they love that, which is the object of his abhorrence and detestation. Keeping of the commandments of God is not only declared, by this author, to be the only satisfying proof of our love

to God, but as being the very thing itself. SERM.

* *This is the love of God, that we keep his* VIII.

commandments; which may lead the attentive reader to make some reflections, that are of use, and greatly tend to illustrate this argument. Certainly we cannot love any thing in God, but what we have a conception of; for what we do not know, and of which we can frame no idea, cannot be the object of our affection. Now, of the real essence of the Supreme Being we know nothing; but we know in some measure his perfections, which are made manifest in his works, and in his word. These therefore must be the objects of our love to our Maker. At the same time, we know, that these perfections of God, which, for distinction's sake, are called natural, such as *eternity, necessary existence, immensity, infinite power, and knowledge*, though they are the objects of our highest admiration, and of our care, yet are not, considered separately from his moral perfections, the objects of our love; nothing can be so but these last mentioned perfections, God's *perfect justice and righteousness, his purity, faithfulness, mercy, and compassion*, all

* 1 John v. 3.

summed

SERM. summed up in *goodness* and *holiness*, perfect, VIII, and unchangeable; and these, in conjunction with eternal power and wisdom, constitute the character of the supreme mind. So then the love of God is, in truth, the love of perfect holiness and goodness, inseparably connected with infinite power and knowledge, in that Being, who is the Father of the Universe, and in a more particular sense, the Father of our Spirits. How clear, therefore, the connexion between this principle and our keeping the commandments of God! For it is manifest, that he, who, in his heart, loveth goodness and purity, so that this love becometh a governing principle, must be in his life good and pure; for according to the state of the heart will the behaviour be. And, on the other hand, the person, whose life is the reverse of goodness and purity, evidently sheweth, that his heart is alienated from them; and that, though these moral qualities have and must always have the testimony of his conscience in their favour, and he may be said, in some sense of the word, to esteem and admire them; yet, notwithstanding, the heart and the strength of the inclinations point the contrary

contrary way, and to those things, which SERM.

VIII.

sequently, he cannot love a being perfectly holy and good. But the person, who is steady in the practice of holiness and goodness, giveth most evident proof, that he loveth holiness and goodness; and if these, as the most excellent and lovely of all things, are the objects of his highest affection, surely his heart must be most engaged to that being, in whom they are found in the greatest possible perfection: in other words, he must love God above all.

These things lead us to consider this Apostle's declarations against all impurity and unrighteousness, which are conceived in the strongest terms. Notwithstanding the spirit of goodness and charity, which he every-where breatheth, yet he can put on the severe countenance in forbidding the practice of any thing, which is evil, and in urging men to the practice of righteousness, as essential to the Christian character, and to those, who are born of God.

** This then is the message, which we have heard of him, and declare unto you; that*

** 1 John i. 15.*

X

God

SERM. God is the light, and in him is no darkness at
VIII. all. If we say we have fellowship with him,
and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the

truth. * Little children, let no man deceive
you; he, that doth righteousness, is righteous,
even as he is righteous. He, that committeth
sin, is of the devil: for this purpose was the
Son of God manifested, that he might destroy
the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of
God doth not commit sin, for his seed remain-
eth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is
born of God. In this the children of God are
manifest, and the children of the devil;
whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God,
neither he, that loveth not his brother. And
not only doth he pronounce an immoral
and wicked life utterly inconsistent with
being born of God, and with the love of
God; but very plainly declareth the spirit
of the world and the lusts of it, (which
may, in some instances, have power over
men, whose lives are not stained with im-
morality) as likewise incompatible with
the state and temper of the children of
God. † Love not the world, neither the
things of the world: if any man love the

* 1 John iii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

† Ib. ii. 15, 16, 17.

world,

world, the love of the Father is not in him; SERM.

for all that is in the world, the lusts of the **VIII**

eye, and the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. The world passeth away and the lusts of it; but he, who doth the will of God, abideth for ever. This is perfectly agreeable to the sentiments of his great master, who representeth the spirit of this world, the party in which it reigned, as set in direct opposition to him and his great design, and to all, who cordially espoused it.

* *These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. † I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Thus it appeareth, that the love of God and good-will towards mankind, purity of manners, righteousness of life, and a temper of spirit raised quite above those things, upon which the*

• John xv. 17, 18, 19. † Ib. xvii. 14.

SERM. children of this world fix as the supreme
 VIII. good, are declared by this author essential
 to that character, which all Christians
 profess, and which the gospel of our Sa-
 viour declareth absolutely necessary, that
 we may may be prepared for, and intitled
 to eternal life.

Finally, the use and the mighty influence
 of faith, in exalting men to this excellent
 temper, are very particularly taught by
 him, and very significantly expressed.

* *Whoſoever believeth, that Jeſus is the
 Chriſt, is born of God. † Whoſoever con-
 feſſeth, that Jeſus is the Chriſt, dwelleth in
 God and God in him. ‡ This is the victory,
 that overcometh the world, even our ſaith.
 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he
 who believeth that Jeſus Chriſt is the Son of
 God. || Theſe things have I written to you,
 that believe on the name of the Son of God,
 that ye may know, that ye have eternal life,
 and that ye may believe on the name of the
 Son of God. § He, that tranſgreſſeth, and
 abideth not in the doctrine of Chriſt, bath
 not God; he, that abideth in the doctrine of
 Chriſt, bath both the Father and the Son.*

* 1 John v. 1. † Ib iv. 15.

† Ib. 13. § 2 John ix. ‡ Ib. v. 4, 5.

Some of these expressions may, at first SERM.

VIII.

be understood ; but in the times, in which the Apostle wrote, and amongst those, to whom he wrote, they were probably easy and familiar ; nor is it difficult for us, by a careful attention, to find out the meaning of them. Whosoever believeth, that Jesus is the Son of God, and by consequence receiveth as sacred truth, what he hath taught and revealed from the Father, embracing it in the love of it, and giving his heart to its powerful influence ; whosoever is thus filled with light, attended with love, is thereby united, so far as a right temper of mind can unite him, to the Supreme Being, and is prepared for fellowship with him : he may be indeed said to be filled with all the fulness of God, and to be an habitation of God by the Spirit. The author calleth this a dwelling in God, and God's dwelling in him. And he, who thus believeth, and hath the Son, hath life ; he hath the divine life begun in him, which is the certain pledge of life everlasting ; the latter being, in truth, no other than the maturity and perfection of the former. Again, faith is the victory, which over-

cometh

X 3

SERM. *cometh to the world.* When the mind, thoroughly

VIII. under the influence of good principles, is full of good affection, raised to a heavenly temper, and hath got a just relish for moral perfection, and the blessings and happiness of the world above, then the spirit of this world will be effectually suppressed, and the lusts of it will die : The many trials and calamities, to which we are obnoxious in this life, will be borne with patience and constancy ; and the believer will find himself raised above both the joys and sorrows of a mortal state, so as not to be dependent upon the one, or deprived of all comfortable enjoyment of being, and made miserable, by the other. This account of things is perfectly consonant to nature, and agreeable to what men feel in their own hearts : and the same doctrines are taught us in many other places of scripture. Our Blessed Lord, in his prayer, *John xvii. 3.* thus expressed himself ; *And this is the life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* He elsewhere says, * *that they, who continue in his word, shall be his disciples indeed, and shall know the truth, and the truth shall*

* *John viii. 31.*

make

make them free; free from the dominion of SERM.

VIII.

impure lusts, and happy in that moral liberty, which is a state of mind, in which men will (from fixed and determined choice and resolution) avoid evil, and follow those things, that are just, true, pure, honest, virtuous, and praise-worthy. Agreeably to this, he teacheth, that *whoever drinketh of the water, which he shall give him, it shall be in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.* And the Apostle Paul, *† We all with open face, under the Christian dispensation, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.* Thus faith purifieth the heart, and worketh by love, and all those holy and good affections, which are necessary to prepare us for the highest advancement and happiness, of which we are capable.

Such is the religion of Christ, as it is represented by the Apostle *John*; and every one must see, that in the sincere practice of it, it will effectually answer the declared end of all religion.

• John iv. 14. † 2 Cor. iii. 18.

X 4

But

SERM. But as we have the most rational and
VIII. just, so we have the most substantial sentiments in the writings of this Apostle.

What can be nobler than his representations of the Supreme Being? God is **light*, and God is *+love*. Light and love, perfect and unchangeable, constitute the most glorious character possible. Again, God is love, *and he, that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. This is the victory, which overcometh the world, even our faith.*

And *|| when he appeareth, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* And how many remarkable passages in the gospel of St. John, which shew the greatest elevation of sentiment? But with respect to some of these texts, which I have mentioned several times in this discourse, it must be observed, that there is an apparent difference in the writings of men, arising from a certain genius, and phraseology, which may be said to be peculiar to certain nations and climates. Thus it hath been often taken notice of by critics, that the inhabitants of the eastern climates have been remarkable for using the boldest figures

* 1 John. i. 5. + 1b, iv. 16. || 1b. iii. 2.

in speech, for the highest flights of the SERM. poetic kind, and a very great elevation and VIII. vivacity of thought; their language, suited to their genius, abounding in lofty expressions, and of the greatest warmth, which strike the imagination with much force.

And this will naturally occur to the reader, when he meeteth with such phrases, as *our dwelling in God*, and *God's dwelling in us*. But it ought to be considered, that religion is the same in all ages, all nations, all climates; and good affections are the same, in all men, and in all places; though with respect to the degree of ardour, they may be very different in the several individuals, which are possessed of them. And therefore these expressions, which I have now mentioned, and others of the same kind in scripture, must be understood to signify something, which all good men are capable of attaining. And they seem to point out that state of the mind, which ariseth from clear views, and a lively sense, of the infinite excellency and goodness of God, correspondent to the astonishing manifestations of them on his part, attended with, and exciting into the highest exercise, the love of God, gratitude to him, charity to

SERM. to mankind, and all worthy affections, on
VIII. our part; thus assimilating the soul to the

blest object of its highest adoration and delight; a state the most excellent, most divine, and which yieldeth to the reflecting mind the greatest satisfaction, and the purest joy. And we are naturally led to this interpretation of these phrases, *dwelling in God*, and *God's dwelling in us*, by the Apostle's saying, that he, who *dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God*. What can be meant by *dwelling in love*, but that the heart is thoroughly and constantly possessed of it; and that love is become, in a manner, the element, in which it liveth? And he, who dwelleth in love, who is in this happy state, *dwelleth in God*; he is in a temper the most divine, in which he beareth the nearest resemblance of his Maker, and is most happily formed for the knowledge and fruition of him.

I come, in the second place, to make some remarks upon the simplicity, and artless manner, in which this Apostle writeth. The account, which we have of him, is, that he was a fisherman upon the lake of *Galilee*; that his father, *Zebedee*, was likewise of that occupation, which maketh it probable,

probable, that *John* was brought up to it SERM.
from his childhood; and he was employed VIII.

in that business when our Saviour called him. A very low occupation; and it is not to be expected, that persons in that way of life could attain to any considerable degree of literature. They must be strangers to the liberal arts and sciences, and even to that sort of knowledge, upon which the learned *Jews* valued themselves. The strain of this Apostle's writings looketh very like the plainness and simplicity of such an education. It hath been often observed, that, with respect to stile or method, his writings do not favour of art, of labour, or those accomplishments, which are accounted polite. He was indeed long under the tuition of the greatest Master; but from him he learned things rather than words; and the inspiration of the Almighty, which gave him understanding in the matters of religion and Christianity, fitted him for teaching it to the world. But, with respect to his manner, he, as the other sacred writers, was evidently left to his own genius. Now, in his writings, we see the greatest simplicity, and the most artless manner imaginable. I speak of his
gospel

SERM. Gospel and Epistles. Indeed in the Book of
VIII. the Revelation, (taking it for granted, that
this book is his) which is of the prophetic
kind, we have an account of many visions,
with which he was favoured ; we have description, and very grand imagery ; which
different manner is a strong presumption,
that the objects were presented to his imagination just as he hath delineated them.
But, I say, in his Gospel, and Epistles, we
see the greatest simplicity. Yet the justest
maxims, the deepest moral philosophy,
and the sublimest sentiments, are scattered
through his writings ; as all, who are capable
of discerning these things, and have read
his writings with attention, will readily
acknowledge ; and a most excellent, and
pure, and elevated spirit, shineth
throughout them. And in the view, which
I am now pursuing, we must take in all
those sublime things, which are said by
him in the person of our Saviour, as well
as what he said in his own : for if he is
imagined to have put a fiction upon the
world, which, in the present argument,
will be the supposition of infidelity, all
must be his own. But, upon such a supposition,
must it not appear unaccountable, where

where such a person as the son of a poor SERM.

VIII.

fisherman, and himself brought up to that business, could come by such just maxims, such knowledge of human nature, such sublime sentiments, as are far from being equalled by any of the ancients, who lived before Christianity appeared in the world, as far as I know? In the writings of this Apostle, we have no appearances of laboured investigation, no continued chains of reasoning, and first principles pursued, through many steps of argumentation, to most distant consequences; and thus truths found out, which could not, without such careful attention and application of the powers of understanding, have been known; which is the method, that the celebrated ancients pursued, and it is every-where seen in their writings: We have, I say, nothing of all this; but without any studied order or method, without any laboured connexion, the most useful and most exalted sentiments are uttered by this author, just as they were suggested to his mind. What then can be more probable, than that they were not the growth of his own genius, or the productions of his own understanding? He must have had an instructor;

SERMON. SEVENTH; his writings cannot possibly
VIII. otherwise be accounted for: and this
maketh it extremely probable, that he got
his knowledge in religion, in the manner,
which his own history relateth; namely,
from the great Prophet of the Christian
church, and a divine illumination.

But this is not all, which is to be said in
favour of Christianity, from the writings
of this author, (to collect and represent
which, was the third general head pro-
posed;) for we see in them the plainest
marks of a most candid and affectionate
spirit. The whole tendency of his writ-
ings is to make men innocent and good, to
fill them with love to God and one another,
and communicate that sacred flame, which
blazed so remarkably in himself. There
are as strong appearances, as can possibly be
in a matter of that nature, that he was in
the greatest earnest in this, and had his
whole heart engaged. Nor, in reality, is
there any other purpose, which his writ-
ings could be intended to serve. Did he
design to impose upon mankind and
deceive them? Delude them into what?
Into the love of God their maker? Into
kind and tender affection to one another?
Into

Into righteousness and purity of manners ? SERM.

VIII.

Into a temper the most exalted above the low spirit of this world, and a state of mind the most divine, to which human nature can attain, and which must always be attended with pleasing inward approbation, the greatest tranquillity, and the most perfect self-enjoyment ? These are the only ends, which his writings can serve : and can such a writer be conceived deliberately to meditate, and execute a scheme for imposing upon and ensnaring the world ?

Let it be seriously considered, whether there be the least probability, that this person invented the story, which he hath given us of the life of our Saviour, and the many discourses, which it containeth ? Is there any thing in his genius and manner of writing, which could incline an impartial reader to think, that he was putting a mere fiction upon mankind, or was in the secret and contrivance with others to do it, and aiding to them in the execution of their design ? It hath been observed upon other occasions, that the part, which the Apostles acted, can by no means be accounted for on the foot of enthusiasm :
and

SERM. and to suppose them a company of wicked
VIII. deceivers, is likewise manifestly absurd.

But there is the most manifest repugnancy between the spirit, which appeareth throughout the writings of the Apostle *John*, and such a character. If ever man wrote with simplicity of spirit, he did; having nothing in his eye, but to publish to the world the glorious things, which he had seen in his great Master, and which he had learned from him; things far above the strength of his own genius to invent.

But, had he been capable of inventing them, and of a corrupt design of putting them upon the world, what purpose he could propose to serve by it, is a question, which doth not admit of any substantial answer. He lived long, and is said to have written his gospel late in life; but he did not live to see his party happy, with respect to the things of this world; for they continued a reproached, and despised, and persecuted people. So that no temporal consideration could be his motive for framing such a fable; a fable, which stood in direct opposition to the principles and expectations of his countrymen; and, in their esteem, perfectly execrable, nor, at
the

the same time, less opposite to the religious SERM. VIII. opinions and customs of the pagan nations. What then is to be said, but that he testified what he knew to be true, and what he was determined to adhere to, be the consequences to himself what they could?

Upon the whole, in the simple and artless manner of this author, in the excellent and sublime sentiments scattered through his writings, in the manifest tendency of them to serve the worthiest purposes to mankind, and in the clear appearances, every-where of a candid and benevolent spirit, we have strong presumptions in favour of the truth of his testimony. He speaketh, indeed, like one, who declared to the world what he had heard and seen; like one, that was the disciple of a master, who spake so as never man did, one, who had conversed with the word made flesh, * and beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In reading some late writings against Christianity, one would indeed be tempted to think, that the authors of them had

* John i. 4.

Y

never

SERM. never perused the New Testament with attention; for if they had, such strong characters of simplicity and integrity, as are every-where to be met with in it, must have made some impression. The great end, which is aimed at in the whole, is evidently the most excellent and worthy, the declared end of all moral discipline whatsoever. And the sacred writers appear every-where to pursue it with the greatest earnestness, and as persons, who had nothing else in view. They ask nothing of any man, but that he believe and obey the gospel, and so put himself into the way of salvation. This they urge with the greatest importunity, and the most affectionate concern. The temper and dispositions, which they study to beget in men, are what constitute the highest excellency, and perfection of nature; and which, where-ever they obtain, will be attended with pleasing inward approbation: so that they shew themselves true friends to mankind; and no one can comply heartily with their instructions, but must find himself in a most desirable state, and, in the words of the Apostle *John*, * *have the witness in himself*. There

* 1 John v. 10.

is

is not, in all their writings, the least trace SERM.
of mean and wicked art, pointing to cor- VIII.

rupt unworthy ends ; but all possible appearances of candour and honest simplicity : and yet these persons must be looked upon as impostors ! Unquestionably true discernment will never admit of this supposition : But if men are determined, contrary to the voice of reason and the strongest appearances, to pronounce them impostors, there is no help for it. But, in truth, one would suspect, that some writers against them have never given themselves leave to think seriously upon the subject. And as it hath been often observed concerning natural philosophy, that a superficial knowledge of it may lead men into a notion, that all is mere matter and mechanism ; but that a thorough study of nature will assuredly make them believers in God : so a slight and superficial view of the religion of Christ, which is enough to furnish men with many objections against it, may consist with unbelief, or perhaps strengthen it ; but a close and serious attention will certainly produce a very different effect. The attentive and ingenuous will discern sincerity and truth ; and will never be able to rest

SERM. in it, as a matter, in which they are
 VIII. thoroughly satisfied, that the apostles of
 our Saviour were deceivers of mankind ;
 but will be strongly induced to believe the
 contrary. It may be truly said of the
 Apostle *John*, that his writings bear the
 very plainest characters of simplicity and
 truth ; and so furnish a very strong argu-
 ment, or, if I must only call it so, pre-
 sumption, of the truth of our holy reli-
 gion. Let us, therefore, receive the testi-
 mony, which he hath given us, *and believe
 on the name of the Son of God, that we may
 obtain eternal life.*

S.E.R.

S E R M O N IX.

Of the debates amongst Christians
in the apostolic age.

ACTS i. 8.

*But ye shall receive power, after that
the Holy Ghost is come upon you,
and ye shall be witnesses to me,
both in Jerusalem, and in all
Judea, and in Samaria, and unto
the uttermost parts of the earth.*

THE amazing success of the apostles SERM.
of our Saviour, and of their disci- IX.

iples, in converting the world to
the Christian faith, hath been often insisted
upon by the apologists for Christianity, as
a strong argument for the truth and divine
authority of this religion. If God shall
work, who can let? If he interposed by

SERM. the communication of such extraordinary

IX. powers to the apostles, as we read in every

page of their history, it is not to be wondered at, that they prevailed against all opposition. But if we suppose the accounts of these powers, which we have in the New Testament, to be all a fiction, and that the apostles combined together to make the world believe a lie, their success is quite unaccountable. They were persons of no character, unknown to the world, till they appeared in it as the disciples of Christ; they were illiterate, and, with respect to men in power, were friendsless; they set themselves in direct opposition to, and were hated by their own countrymen; and most hated by the learned and great; they set themselves likewise to overthrow all the idolatry and superstition of the *Gentile* world, and all the civil establishments of religion; and in these attempts succeeded so far, that vast numbers in a great many different ages became Christians; and upon the foundations then laid, Christianity hath subsisted in the world to this day. That such men should have been capable of establishing in the world a fable followed with such consequences,

quences, is wonderful, indeed, beyond all SERM.

IX.

converts to Christianity must have received the testimony of the apostles concerning our Saviour, as the very truth ; for nothing could tempt them to embrace that religion, but the conviction of their own consciences. There was no appearance of their being gainers by it in point of fortune or temporal interest, no honour or reputation in the world to be hoped for. On the contrary, the Christians were a set every-where spoken against, and whosoever professed that religion knew, that he laid himself open to vexations, reproach, and persecution, and must profess it at the hazard of estate, liberty, and probably of life. Is it to be imagined then, that men of any understanding would embrace this religion, without being fully persuaded in their own minds concerning the truth and divine authority of it ? Yet if the witnesses for Christ were imposing upon the world, those persons, who were their contemporaries, had a fair opportunity of detecting the falshood of their testimony ; particularly, with respect to the extraordinary powers, with which they pretended to be endowed

SERM. endowed themselves, and which they are

IX. said to have communicated to some others. And when reputation in the world, interest, and life, were concerned, it is not to be imagined, that amongst multitudes of converts, some, at least, would not inquire with great diligence, and be fully satisfied before they gave their assent. And, therefore, that they did give their assent, take upon them this hated profession, and continue firm in it, notwithstanding all the persecutions, to which they were exposed, sheweth, that they were, upon inquiry, thoroughly convinced. And as they had such opportunity of making a full inquiry into the grounds and foundations of the religion of Christ, this maketh it highly probable, that the foundations of it were laid in truth; and that by the power of truth only, the apostles of our Saviour succeeded in their endeavours to convert the world.

And, as hath been already observed upon another occasion, there is neither in the religion of Christ itself, nor in the methods by which it was propagated, any thing, which hath the appearance of a design to impose upon mankind. The great end, which

which that religion pursueth, is the reformation of men; recovering them from depravity, and corruption of heart and manners, to a pure and godlike temper; restoring them to the divine favour, and raising them to the assured hope of a happy immortality. * *The end of the command-*

IX.

ment is charity, out of a pure heart, out of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. And, † The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this world; looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Now, if such was really the design, which Jesus Christ and his apostles pursued, as it appeareth manifestly to have been from all, which they did and taught, so far as a design can be collected from what men do and say, surely it must recommend itself to the favourable acceptance of every ingenuous mind, as being

* Tim. i. 5. † Tit. ii. 2.

the

SERM. the most distant possible from those selfish
IX. and corrupt ends, at which dissimulation
and falsehood are always supposed to aim.

And if the methods, which the apostles used in propagating this religion in the world, and the manner, in which they conducted the design, be considered, we shall see nothing like artifice and cunning; but indeed very plain traces of the greatest simplicity and honesty: Amongst other instances of which it is very remarkable, that they record things, which are manifestly to the disadvantage of their own characters, and which must have had a great tendency to hinder their design; and some circumstances, which shew, that they were engaged in a work, the real intention of which they did not, at the first, understand; and that, in the carrying it on, there was not only a diversity of counsels among them, but jarring and hot contentions. I shall, in this discourse, consider some of these things, which I think will afford a strong presumptive argument, that the apostles were not in any deep design, or cunning combination to impose upon the world, but acted their part with the greatest simplicity.

For

For the illustration of this, in the first SERM.

IX.

place, let it be remembered, which in the present argument I must take for granted, that the *Jews* had an expectation begotten in them by the ancient oracles, which universally prevailed, that *Messiah*, that is, as they understood the matter, a prince, who was of the house of *David*, should be raised to the kingdom ; a prince, who should deliver the *Jewish* nation from all subjection and servitude to foreigners, and not only render them independent, but exalt their empire over the world ; a glorious king, who, while he made their external state prosperous, should at the same time set all things right with respect to religion, and for ever banish all idolatry. There was good reason from the Old Testament to believe, and it was generally believed, that the *Messiah* should appear about that time, in which *Jesus Christ* did actually appear. And accordingly all men, who attended to such matters, were full of expectation ; and certain persons, who were impostors, did, one after another, actually assume that character. And as our Blessed Lord, when he manifested himself to the world, gave plain evidence, that

SERM. that divine power rested upon him, such
IX. as in some instances fully convinced his
followers, that he was really the Messiah;
so we find, that, according to the prevailing
notions of the *Jews*, they expected from
him temporal blessings and prosperity.
Thus the multitude, whom he is recorded,
in the sixth of *John's* gospel, to have
sed miraculously, were for making him
king immediately, and for using force, if
they could not procure his consent to their
design; they had no doubt, but that he was
the long-expected prince, and were for
proclaiming him forthwith. The same
apprehension, concerning the appearance
of the Messiah at that time, was probably
the cause of *Herod's* jealousy, when he
heard of the wisdom from the east, and
what they had said of a child then born,
who was to be king of the *Jews*. He
suspected, that he might lose his crown,
or, at least, that he might be greatly dis-
turbed in the possession of it; and so, in
the cruelty of his abandoned spirit, he sent
and slew the young children, which were
in *Bethlehem*, and all the coasts of it. This
notion of a visible temporal kingdom pre-
vailed among our Saviour's own disciples;
and

and it seemeth, that upon this foundation SERM.
they set out to be his followers, expecting IX.

great things from him. Many passages in the history evidently shew this. And our Blessed Lord, as he was at great pains to form the minds of his disciples to the practice of true religion, and to patience of evil and persecution, of which he often forewarned them, and clearly enough pointed out to them, on several occasions, his own future sufferings and death ; so he dropped many hints, with respect to the nature of his kingdom, which tended to cool their hopes of temporal prosperity under his administration : yet for certain wise reasons ; one of which was, that they could not then *bear* all that he had to say to them, and probably others, which are not explained to us, he did not make them thoroughly acquainted with the design and state of his kingdom. The unfolding of this fully was reserved to that glorious time, when, upon our Saviour's ascent, the spirit was poured on them from on high, thoroughly furnishing them for all the busyness of their important mission. We find then, that during our Blessed Saviour's life, the apostles retained much of the common

SERM. common prejudice. And as their fancies

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were pleased with the hopes of high preferment in his kingdom, so they were very earnest to know, who should be chief in it. * *James* and *John* had the boldness to ask, that they might be his chief ministers; which raised no small indignation in the minds of the other disciples. And with the same spirit, *Peter*, often apt to be forward, tells his master, *† they had left all and followed him, and what, says he, shall we have therefore?* And upon some occasions, when our Lord spake to them of his future sufferings; these things, we are told, were hid from them; they could not comprehend his meaning. Especially, *Peter* took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, § *Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee.* For if such things were to come upon him, they could not but see, that all their pleasing hopes must perish at once. Thus, according to their own account, they set out as our Saviour's followers with full expectations of a kingdom in this world, and of their being advanced to high power and honour in it.

* Mark x. 35. † Matt. xiv. 27. § Ib. xvi. 22.

And

And even after our Lord's resurrection, SERM.
their hopes, then revived, were of the IX.
same kind. His crucifixion had filled

them with confusion, even with despair :
his rising from the dead gave new life to
their expectations, but still of a temporal
glory. * *Lord, wilt thou at this time re-*

store again the kingdom to Israel ? But
though the disciples set out with such
hopes and expectations, and continued long
to retain them ; yet when the great design
is fully unravelled, lo ! there was nothing
of a temporal kingdom in it. Our Sa-
viour's servants were to expect, not stations
of power and honour upon earth, of wealth
or prosperity : on the contrary, they had
nothing before them, but tribulation, and
persecution, and suffering, even to death.
And when, fully instructed by a divine il-
lumination, they came to explain to the
world the design and nature of Christ's
kingdom, it proved to be nothing at all
like the kingdoms of this world ; they
give up at once all their former schemes
and hopes, and strike out to us quite an-
other plan ; teaching their followers to

* Acts i. 6.

look

SERM. look not for temporal glory, but immortality; preaching the doctrine of repentance

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for the remission of sin, for obtaining the favour of God, and an inheritance in the invisible world, which is incorruptible, undesired, and which fadeth not away.

Let us now take the sense of things, which the apostles had first and last, according to their own account; and as we see, it was very different, so the appearance, which we see of this difference in their writings, is a very considerable presumption, that they tell us the truth. If at the beginning they had, in truth, with the rest of the *Jews*, these mistaken apprehensions concerning Messiah's kingdom, it was very natural, that they should follow *Jesus Christ*, big with hopes of being great men; and that, when they were better instructed in the nature of his kingdom, and the immortal glory and happiness to be obtained in it, as the reward of a patient continuance in well-doing, they should renounce all their former delusive hopes, and embrace a state in the invisible world, as infinitely preferable to all the happiness, that they had imagined to themselves in this.

But

But if these persons intended to impose SERM.

upon the world, nothing could be more IX.

foolishly or clumsily contrived. When they begin their account, they set out with the hopes of a temporal kingdom : But then their great Lord and Master, upon whom was all their dependance, was crucified ; and this quashed their hopes for a time. They proceed to tell us, that in a very little time he arose from the dead, and with him their hopes revive ; but then we hear no more of a temporal, only of a spiritual kingdom. Now, if indeed they were endeavouring to impose upon mankind, they must have been working upon two schemes. First, that of a temporal state and kingdom ; and, when this design failed them, then they set themselves to dress up a scheme of a kingdom purely spiritual, and which was not to be perfected upon earth, but in the heavenly world. But, not to speak of the improbability, that when the first design failed them, they should fall upon another directly contrary to it, and contrary to the general sense of the nation concerning Messiah's kingdom ; in pursuance of which they were like to meet with no encouragement, and not at

Z

all

SERM. all to advance themselves to credit, or
IX. power, or wealth, in this world ; on the

contrary, they might be sure, that they would meet with fierce opposition, especially, as they still insisted, that *Jesus*, whom the *Jews* had crucified, was the Son of God, and the Messiah ; so loading their countrymen with the greatest guilt, and fixing upon them the brand of greatest infamy : Not to speak, I say, of the improbability of this ; it is beyond all imagination, that, if they had intended to impose upon the world, they should not only go thus from one scheme, which was frustrated, to another ; but that they should publish to the world, and leave on record to all future generations, their own gross blundering ; openly, and to all, who should peruse the New Testament, confessing, that they had been long at work upon one design, in which they were disappointed and baffled, and then turned to another quite different. If they were men of deep intrigue, nay, if they had but common understanding, it was not possible, that they should be capable of this. And, therefore, it seems to be evident, that they were not intending, nor endeavouring, to

to put a fiction upon the world ; but that, SERM. 2.
with great simplicity, they tell the truth as IX.

it really was. I cannot pass this without taking notice, that a modern author, an adversary to the Christian religion, hath laboured to shew, that the apostles never meant any thing other than a political interest. He seemeth, indeed, to except the Apostle Paul ; but insisteth upon the truth of the assertion, with respect to the other apostles. That this is false, is as evident as can be, from the writings of St. Peter, and St. John. But, indeed, the proof, which this author hath given, that the apostles at first thought of a temporal kingdom, compared with the turn, which this matter afterwards took, and the simple account, which they have left us of the whole, is a strong presumption, that they tell us the real truth, with respect to that affair.

But let us, in the next place, consider, how they pursued the scheme of a spiritual kingdom, when they had expressly embraced it ; and whether, in the conduct of it, any thing appeareth like combination, and a design to impose upon the world. It will be acknowledged, to be of absolute

SERM. necessity, in all such dark affairs, that the
IX. secret should be most carefully kept; and

that if men, who are in it, should have any debates among themselves concerning it (especially any thing, which is fundamental to it) these debates should be carefully concealed from the knowledge of the world: otherwise the whole design must be in danger of being lost. If the mystery be once unfolded by variance and contention amongst the managers, the best concerted scheme must fall to the ground. But we find, that the design, in which the apostles were engaged, and the scheme, which they carried on, was not managed with such unanimity. It appeareth from the history, that at their first setting out to preach Christ crucified and risen again from the dead, there was no notion at all, that the *Gentiles* were to be received into the Christian church, and put in all respects upon a level with the *Jews*. But we are told, in the history of *Cornelius*, *Acts* x. that this great affair was explained and fully determined by express revelation; the Apostle *Peter*, being instructed by a very significant vision, that he ought to call *no man common or unclean*; and particularly directed

directed to go to the house of *Cornelius*. SERM.

There, while he was preaching Christ to

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the *Gentiles*, the Holy Ghost descended upon them; and this, and the above-mentioned vision, were his defence at *Jerusalem*, against the *Jews*, who found fault with him for going to men uncircumcised, and eating with them. But now upon the conversion of the *Gentiles* to the Christian faith, a very great controversy arose, which continued long, and was managed with much heat; namely, whether the *Gentile* converts were under an obligation to be circumcised, and to keep the ritual part of the law of *Moses*? The *Jews*, as it was no wonder they should, had universally an high veneration for *Moses*, as the great prophet and law-giver, whom God had sent to their fathers; and for his laws, as being of divine authority, and intended to be always binding. They had no notion, that the *Mosaic* constitution should ever be abrogated; or that any other should be introduced in the room of it. And the charge against *Stephen*, whom they stoned to death, was, that he taught, that *Jesus Christ* should destroy that place, and alter the customs, which *Moses* delivered to them,

SERM. them. The *Jewish* converts to the Christ-

IX. tian faith seem to have been generally of the same opinion with their other countrymen, that the constitutions of *Moses* were to be everlasting; and many of them declared against all fellowship, in sacred things, with the *Gentiles*; unless they conformed to the *Mosaic* rites, and, particularly, submitted to circumcision. This matter was very hotly debated in the church of *Antioch*; the Apostle *Paul* being the great champion for the liberty of the *Gentiles*, and strenuously arguing against those, who had come down from *Jerusalem*, and taught the necessity of circumcision, and keeping the law of *Moses*, that no such conformity in the *Gentiles* was necessary. When the matter could not be accorded at *Antioch* by their frequent conferences there, that Christian society, probably much disquieted in their minds, determined to have the judgment of the church of *Jerusalem* upon it. Accordingly *Paul* and *Barnabas*, and some others, went up to *Jerusalem*; and when they had assembled the apostles, and elders, and brethren, they laid this controversy before them. In this assembly, the point was fully

fully debated ; and in conclusion they gave SERM.

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Gentiles should not be obliged to subject themselves to the *Mosaic* rites, but only, that they should * *abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.* This, which was the principal controversy in the primitive church, was managed in some places with much heat and ill-nature, as is very evident from the epistles of *Paul*, especially to the *Romans* and *Galatians*. And it seems, that they were not a few, to whom this Apostle gave very hard names; but very justly, as persons, who took advantage of this debate to sow discord in the Christian church, that they might serve their own ends. And it appeareth, that some of them used great freedom with his character particularly, and laid many grievous things to his charge ; from which, principally for the sake of his ministry, he doth, with very great spirit, defend himself in his epistles. It was upon occasion of this controversy, as we find, *Galat. ii. 11.* that he found great fault with the Apostle *Peter*, whom he accuseth

* Acts xv. 29.

SERM. of dissimulation. But when Peter was come

IX. to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, in so much, that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw, that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? Here it will not be improper to make some observations upon the character of this eminent man, who was the chief apostle of the circumcision.

It hath been observed before, that the sacred writers have brought upon the stage one character, in all respects perfect, which they have wonderfully supported; viz. that of their great Lord and Master. But with respect to the lives and characters of his followers, even the most eminent among them, they do not at all conceal their weaknesses, some of them not a little offensive,

offensive ; which is a strong presumption, SERM.
that they write with simplicity and sincerity. IX.

And this appeareth the more probable from what hath been already taken notice of, that the characters in the New Testament are very happily preserved, each of them perfectly consistent and of a piece with itself, bearing all the marks of being real characters in life. We see this exemplified in the case of the Apostle *Peter*. He was highly honoured of his Master ; he was admitted to be a witness of the transfiguration ; and *Jesus* took him, together with the two sons of *Zebedee*, along with him into that retirement, where he suffered such an agony in his spirit before he was apprehended by the *Jews* ; he had the honour of being the first preacher of the gospel, after our Lord's resurrection, both to *Jew* and *Gentile*. And he seemeth to have been naturally of a very warm, and affectionate heart ; but, at the same time, of some feebleness of spirit. When our Saviour asked his disciples, after having heard from them the various opinions of others concerning him, What they themselves thought ? *Peter* was the first in making

SERM. making the solemn confession, * *that he was the Christ* ; and at the approach of our

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Lord's suffering, he expressed the strongest resolution of cleaving to him, declaring, that, though all others should forsake him, he would not, and that he would die with him rather than deny him. And when the officers of the *Jews* brought a band of men to take *Jesus*, *Peter* was the only man, who made any resistance, wounding a servant of the high priest. Yet we see, that with all the affectionate warmth of his heart, and forwardness of his spirit, he discovered, in some instances, much weakness ; and though he was hearty and honest in his resolutions, yet in acting his part, he failed. When he was in the high priest's hall, waiting to see what would become of his master, he was so frightened, that he denied all relation to him, not without oaths. And, on occasion of the debates at *Antioch*, he was so afraid of the *Jews*, that he acted a mean and pusillanimous part, complying with their superstitious imaginations, contrary to the light of his own mind, for which he was sharply rebuked by the Apostle *Paul*.

* Matt. xvi. 16.

Such

Such characters we often meet with in human life; in which we see warmth, and zeal, and cheerfulness, in undertaking,

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where yet men are defective in that strength and firmness of mind, which are requisite to make them happy in execution. But though such was *Peter's* natural temper, yet we see, that, in several instances, aided from above, he acted a most heroic part; particularly, in the first persecutions, which were raised by the *Jews* after our Lord's resurrection, he was the boldest speaker, and treated all their attempts against the Christian cause with that neglect, which became a most assured mind. To return from this digression :

You may observe, how warm this controversy, concerning the *Gentile* converts, was, in the primitive church; the *Jews*, obstinate in their prejudices; and the Apostle *Paul*, and such as joined with him, inflexible in defending the cause of truth and liberty. It seems the debate was carried, in some places, so high, as to become the cause of a breach in Christian communion. Now, considering the heats, which this matter occasioned, and the length, to which the dissension was carried,

SERMON. ried, it is by no means probable, that the
IX. dissenting parties were in a plot to impose

upon the world; or that a scheme, which, at the bottom, was mere imposture, could subsist and bear up against such animosities. Although some persons engaged in this controversy were very much heated, and had a most hearty dislike of their antagonists, still we do not meet with the least hint, that any of them gave up the whole of Christianity, or charged the patrons of, or advocates for it, as impostors. None of them divulged any such secret, as, that all, by which they had so much amused the world, was the artful contrivance of some wicked and designing men. But in all the fierceness of their contention, they agreed in the great articles of the Christian faith, that *Jesus* was the son of God, that he was the promised Messiah, and that he was risen from the dead. If indeed these contentions had happened long after Christianity had got footing, and prevailed in the world, this argument, taken from them, would have been but of very small force; but we find jarring and disagreement in the very opening of the scene. This doth not at all look like intrigue and stratagem.

stratagem. And any one, who attentively SERM.

readeth the writings of the Apostle Paul, IX.

upon the subject of these debates, will evidently see, that he wrote not like a person, who was tenderly nursing and supporting an imposture, and feared a discovery; but like one, who was fully convinced of the truth of what he said, and the importance of it, and who had good authority to bear him out, and therefore would be true to his principles, whoever should oppose him. No matter to him, if the great name of

Peter was in the opposite party, or if the established reputation of a *Barnabas* stood in his way; he would go with none of them farther than they acted an upright part, and abode by the simplicity of the gospel. He would * *not give place, no not for an hour*, at the expence of truth and of his own sincerity. It must be owned, that differences in opinion, with respect to matters of religion, when attended with animosity and a contentious spirit, are very bad and hurtful, and often followed with most pernicious consequences: they greatly afflicted and hurt even the primitive church. However, we have this one good conse-

• Gal. ii. 5.

quence

SERM. quence following upon the hot debates in
IX. the apostolic age, that it must appear extremely improbable, that men, who had such fierce contentions among themselves, should be combined together in a plot against mankind, and in pursuing a designingly and artfully framed to impose upon the world. The Apostle *Paul*, in some of his discourses upon these debates, doth plainly mention false brethren, and some, who seem to have been of the very worst characters, men, who served not Jesus Christ, but their own bellies, persons of the lowest, most corrupted, and illiberal spirits; and low spirits indeed they must have been, who merely for the sake of what they could get from the bounty and charity of Christians, in a state of continual oppression and persecution, took upon them the character of Christians or ministers of Christ, while in their hearts they were at enmity with his religion: Yet it seems, that some such there were: and he speaketh of them, who opposed him, with great bitterness, and preached Christ out of envy and contention; and does not doubt to call some of them ministers of Satan. But he biddeth all these opponents
the

the openest defiance; and yet we do not SERM.
find, that any discovery was made, either IX.
to the disadvantage of his reputation, or of
the cause of Christianity, or that any of
his adversaries dared to charge him as an
impostor.

But the controversy between the believing *Jews*, and the *Gentile* converts, and those, who took their part, though it was the principal, yet was not the only controversy, or matter in dispute, in the primitive times. We see, that, even in the apostolic age, there were heresies, which were the offspring of men of corrupt minds, and reprobate concerning the faith. Thus the Apostle *Paul* warneth the elders of *Ephesus*, that after his departure, grievous wolves should enter in among them, not sparing the flock: Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. And he tells the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. xi. 19. *There must be also heresies among you, that he, who is approved, may be made manifest among you.* And the Apostle *Peter*, in his second epistle, doth, with great severity of style, inveigh against false teachers, who brought in damnable heresies, denying the Lord, who

SERM. who bought them, and who brought upon

IX. *walked after the flesh. † Wells without water; clouds, that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever: for when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those, who were clean escaped from them, who live in error. Making manifest the unhappy issue of such apostacy from the gospel according to godliness. † For if after they had escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of life, than after they have known it to depart from the holy commandment once delivered to them: but it is happened unto them according to the true proverb; the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow, that was washed, to his wallowing in the mire. To the same purpose, and probably of the same kind of heretics, St Jude speaketh. And the*

* 2 Pet. ii. 10. † Ib. 17, 18. † Ib. 20, 21, 22.

Apostle

Apostle Paul warneth Timothy against some, SERM.

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* *who crept into houses, and led captives silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* And he directeth Titus to † *reject the heretic, after the first and second admonition, knowing that such an one is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* So the Apostle † John speaketh of many antichrists, which were in his time in the world. Thus while the Christian church was persecuted by open and declared enemies, and who were always enemies to the Christian name and faith, she likewise underwent not a little trouble from men of corrupt minds, who made indeed profession of Christianity, but yet endeavoured to draw Christians away from the truth and simplicity of the gospel into pernicious errors; and who made *shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.* But how is it conceivable, that Christianity, had it been a cunningly contrived fable, and a mere imposition upon mankind, could have subsisted in such a state? Would no false brother, could he

* Tim. iii. 6. † Tit. iii. 10. † 1 John ii. 18.

SERM. have penetrated into the secret, have betrayed it? And must not these men, upon

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whom the apostles so severely animated, have endeavoured intirely to overthrow their authority, rather than be made, by their means, an object of general aversion? Is it possible, that when so many without, and some within the church, were bitter enemies, that the delusion should not have been exposed? Or can any man imagine, in a state of division and dissension amongst professed Christians themselves, that the secret of an imposture should be inviolably kept? I think nothing is plainer, for instance, from the writings of the Apostle *Paul*, than that there were false brethren, to whom it would have given high pleasure to have been able to prove, that he was an impostor. But no such discovery appeareth; he supported his reputation in spite of all that they could do.

And to all this may be added the consideration of the parties and factions, which were in particular churches; especially that of *Corinth*, which was unhappily disturbed by false teachers, and had run into hateful divisions, attended with great contention and

and animosity. The Apostle Paul writes SERM.

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to that church upon this subject, with just severity ; and he takes notice, that some of the leaders of these parties had done all they could to vilify and lessen his character ; not only admonishing that Christian society to correct what was amiss, but letting them know, that if they persisted in what was so unworthy of them, he would be obliged to make use of his apostolic power in a manner, which was disagreeable to himself, because it must be greatly to their disadvantage. Would a man of understanding have written in this manner, if he had been conscious to himself of any secret in his character, or life, which possibly might be found out, and was sufficient to ruin all his pretensions ? There is in this, and in the other apostles, an evident firmness, and undaunted resolution, in opposing enemies without and enemies within the church ; which could spring from nothing but integrity of heart, and a sincere attachment to what they knew to be the truth. They spoke, and wrote, and acted, like persons, who were not apprehensive, that any secret could be disclosed to their confusion.

A a 2

And

SERM. And thus it appeareth, that as there is

IX. nothing in the religion of Christ itself, and the only design, which it pursueth, which looketh like imposture; so, in the manner in which the apostles conducted themselves, and carried on this design, and the representations, which they have left us of the situation and circumstances, in which they found themselves, and the part, which, with regard to those, they acted, there is not only nothing, which savoureth of falsehood, dissimulation, and corrupt design; but on the contrary, there are the strongest appearances of truth and sincerity. It may be most justly said, that if they were really men of integrity and truth, there could not be stronger appearances of it in their conduct. And unless the reader should imagine, that all these circumstances, with respect to the state of the primitive church, the controversies, which were in it, the heresies, which sprung up, the many enemies the apostles had to conflict with, and the frank, and open, and undaunted manner, in which they opposed them; unless, I say, the reader should imagine the whole a mere fiction, (an imagination, which no man of understanding will admit) he will be

be obliged to acknowledge, that the SERM.
apostles did bear an honest testimony to IX.
the truth, and that they were persons of
candour and sincerity; not intending to
impose upon mankind, but to lead them
into the way of salvation.

S E R -

S E R M O N X.

Christianity referred to the sincere inquiries and impartial judgments of mankind.

2 COR. IV. 2.

*But have recounted the bidden things
of dishonesty ; not walking in
craftiness, nor handling the word
of God deceitfully ; but by mani-
festation of the truth, commend-
ing ourselves to every man's con-
science in the sight of God.*

SERM. X. **E**VERY one, who attendeth to the nature and design of religion, must see, that it is seated in the heart, and consisteth in acting agreeably to the will of God, from right principles and affections.

fections. The sum of it, as we are taught SERM.

in scripture, is, to love the Lord with all X.

our hearts, and minds, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves; and where such love possesseth the heart, it cannot fail of being productive of all the natural fruits of piety, righteousness, and charity, in the actions of life. But should we suppose, that men did perform the external acts of piety and devotion, without love of God; this would be so far from being true religion, that it would be most offensive hypocrisy: and in like manner, if works of righteousness and charity were done without principle and right affection, they could not be accepted. To consider this matter in another light; our religion is represented, in scripture, as consisting in faith and in practice. We are saved by faith, which must be understood to signify, not merely an assent to certain principles, but a cordial embracing of the truth, as that, which is to direct us in the conduct of life. The saving efficacy of faith supposeth, that the wisdom, which is from above, hath entered into the heart, and modelled it aright; and denoteth such a sense of truth, and feeling of its power, as

A a 3 will

SERM. will determine men, as the Apostle John

X. speaketh, to *walk in it*. And as to the practice, which Christianity requireth ; namely, *that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*, it consisteth in obedience, springing from a pure heart, from right principles and affections, and doing our duty with sincere regard to divine authority.

From this view of religion, it plainly appeareth, that force or compulsion can never be a natural and proper means of promoting it. Men may indeed be compelled, by temporal penalties, to make a profession, which shall be agreeable to the sentiments of those, who have power over them ; and they may be compelled to do certain external actions ; but the assent and persuasion of the mind is not at all an object of force and compulsion, and can arise from nothing, but the appearance of truth to it. In like manner, with respect to practice, the external action is what men may be compelled to ; but to act from principle or affection can never be the effect of force or temporal penalty. Who ever thought of compelling men to the exercise of love, of good-will, of piety and compassion, of meekness,

meekness, contentment, and other such SERM.
virtuous and good dispositions and affec- X.

tions? Or what power on earth can certainly and infallibly judge, whether these affections are exercised in the heart or not? It is plain then, that, considered as the subjects of God's moral kingdom, and practising religion, men must be intirely voluntary. Their faith must be a firm persuasion of the truth, with a cordial attachment to it, arising from the conviction of their own minds; and good affections can never be raised by any thing, in our power, but a frequent and close attention to the objects of them; and endeavouring to divest the mind of all unjust prejudices, by which it may have been possessed.

And it is as plain a consequence from all this, that no one is capable of being our judge in matters of religion, but he, who knoweth the heart, and can judge concerning the sincerity of our faith, and the real principles of our obedience.

But farther, if that faith, or belief of the truth, which is represented as the root of all holiness and obedience, is a persuasion of the mind, attended with an affectionate consent of the heart; (without which

SERM. which the firmest persuasion availeth no-

X. thing to the purposes of the faith of a Christian) and if, where matters are not of such a nature, that conviction of the truth, proposed to the mind, immediately and necessarily taketh place, attention and inquiry and judging for themselves, so far as men are capable of inquiring and judging, are the proper means of begetting the persuasion, and which the author of nature intended we should use; then certainly we must, in this whole matter, be independent of all mere authority of man. To receive things as true, upon the appearance of evidence to the mind, and to receive them upon mere human authority, without evidence, are things quite opposite, and indeed inconsistent. I speak not now of facts, which must be received upon human testimony; but concerning matters of opinion and judgment, in which we have a power, and are called, to judge for ourselves. So far as men rely upon mere human authority in such matters, so far do they give up what is their natural and unalienable right. And while they assert this right, and judge upon evidence appearing to their own minds, they must disclaim all human

human authority ; which they justly do, SERM.
for this plain reason, that men of like pas- X.

sions and infirmities with themselves are not infallible, and may lead them astray ; and their being so led will not prove a substantial apology for them at last, if they themselves had a capacity and opportunity of judging better, and of attaining to the knowledge of the truth. But the divine authority is to be submitted to without exception, upon this sure foundation, that the God of truth can never be mistaken, or deceived himself, or deceive others. The observations are common, and in which all protestants are agreed.

But my main intention, in the present discourse, being to shew you, that the liberty and independence in inquiring into, and judging concerning the truth in matters of religion, which is established in the New Testament, and our being accountable in these matters only to God, is a strong presumptive argument of the truth of Christianity ; I shall, first, particularly shew what we are taught concerning this point by our Blessed Saviour and his apostles ; and then lay before you the strength of the argument taken from it.


The

SERM. of The Apostle Paul, in my text, glorieth

X. in it, that he and his fellow-labourers had renounced the hidden things of dishonesty; not walking in craftiness, not banding the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And elsewhere, he saith, that *they were not at many, which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.* Our Blessed Saviour himself, when he witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, and declared, that, though he was a king, his kingdom was not of this world, doth, at the same time, in a very few words, give an account of the nature of his kingdom. *+ Thou sayest, speaking to Pilate, that I am a king: for this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth: every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice.* Truth is the only foundation of my kingdom: I have no authority, but what resteth upon it; and every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice: all such persons are my subjects.

* 2 Cor. ii. 17. + John xviii. 27.

This

This blessed King, when he appeared in SERM. X. 

dentials of his mission from the Father.

The prophecies of the Old Testament bore witness concerning him; and indeed some of them so clearly, that they did not only raise in the *Jews* an expectation, that the Messiah would about that time appear; but were such, that as they were fulfilled in *Jesus Christ*, they could not be fulfilled in any other person; though the completion of them did not as fully appear before the wonderful scene of his life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, was closed, as afterwards: and the miracles, which he wrought, must put it past all reasonable doubt, that the power of the highest rested upon him, and that he was indeed sent by the Father. Which evidence was carried, as far as such evidence could possibly be carried, by our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and by what followed upon it, the effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the extraordinary powers communicated to the apostles. Accordingly we find our Saviour referreth his hearers to the miracles, which he worked, as a proof of his mission; *John* x. 37. *If I do not the works of my Father,*
tber,

SERM. ther, believe me not; but if I do, though ye

X. believe me not, believe the works, that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Again, * Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works sake. He desireth the Jews, likewise, to look into his life, and see if there was any thing in it of wickedness, of fraud and deceit, by which they might be reasonably induced to suspect him of imposture. † Which of you convinceth me of sin; and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? Surely, if they could charge him with nothing evil, and if his innocence and goodness were suspected, it was a strong presumption in his favour. And he desireth them § to search the scriptures; for in them, they thought, they had eternal life; and these are they, saith he, that testify of me.

From all this, you see, that our Blessed Lord treated his hearers as reasonable creatures, who were to act from principle and conviction, and who had a right to demand evidence from him of his mission, in a character so extraordinary and im-

• John xiv. 11. † Ib. viii. 46, § Ib. v. 39.


portant. And it is plain, that he leaveth SERM.

the judgment to themselves. He letteth X.

them know, indeed, that they must answer it to God, how they judged, and how they acted, in this great affair ; and that, if they wilfully continued in unbelief, the consequences would be fatal. But to make use of any of the methods of this world, to subject them to his scepter, was no part of his plan ; he leaveth them to stand or fall, at the great day, according to the principles, upon which they acted, and their behaviour in pursuance of them. If they could approve themselves to God, it was enough ; and of that miraculous power, which he exerted in so many instances, nothing was applied for their present punishment. Yet, no doubt, he might, had it consisted with his design, have so applied it ; and if such had been the plan of providence, the great men upon earth, and civil magistrates, might have been so overruled by divine power, that they should have been upon our Saviour's side, and have made it penal for any one to reject him. But we find nothing of all this ; he pleaded his cause by reason and argument, and no otherwise.

That

SERM. That he should denounce future judg-

X. ments upon unbelievers, is not to be wondered at, where he knew, that their unbelief proceeded from the perverseness of their spirits; * *This was the condemnation, that light was come into the world, and they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* If ye should suppose, therefore, any well-disposed and sincere persons, who were ready to hear, and affectionately to embrace the truth, if they could but discern it; who were free of corrupt and vicious prejudices, but from mere want of capacity, and strength of mind, failed of their duty; such do not at all come within the character, against which such judgments are denounced; these being manifestly pointed only against men of bad hearts, and whose culpable prejudices were so strong, as either to pervert a serious and impartial inquiry, and so to shut out all light, or, which is much worse, to make them obstinate in their opposition to the truth, though they saw it ever so clearly, and even, to act in direct contradiction to the voice of their own con-

* John iii. 19.

sciences.

sciences. And this last may seem to have SERM.

been the case of some, whose malice and X.

opposition to our Blessed Saviour, sup-
posing him to have been such a character
in life as the gospel representeth him, and
to have done those miracles, which the
history recordeth, can hardly otherwise be
accounted for. What could men of under-
standing and discernment, who believed
the facts, think, when the eyes of the
blind were opened, when hearing was in a
moment given to the deaf, and limbs to
the maimed and paralytic; when the raging
sea appeared to be subjected to our Saviour's
command; when, by a creating power,
he multiplied a few loaves and fishes to
such a quantity, as was sufficient to feed a
multitude of several thousands; nay, when
even the dead were raised by him? Strange
it must be, if he had not in some of his
enemies, especially such as were most at-
tentive and thinking, the testimony of their
conscience fully in his favour! But if it
shall be thought impossible, that human na-
ture should be capable of the production of
a creature so monstrous and diabolical, as
to set himself in opposition to our Saviour,
while convinced, that he was sent of God;

B b

in

SERM. in that case, prejudice against the truth

X. *must be acknowledged to have prevailed in*

these men to the highest possible degree,

and to have intirely blinded their minds.

And that this was generally the case with

the unbelieving Jews, is a supposition

much countenanced by the words of our

Blessed Saviour upon the cross, Father, for-

give them; for they know not what they do,

Luke xxiii. 34. The history informeth us,

that even his bitterest enemies were obliged

to acknowledge in him a power more than

human; and alleged, as an account of his

works, what was the most infamous of all

reproaches, that he was in confederacy

with the prince of devils, and did those

miraculous things by infernal power. To

this our Blessed Lord's answer will, to im-

*partial minds, be fully satisfying; * Every*

kingdom divided against itself is brought to

desolation; and every city or house divided

against itself shall not stand: and if Satan

cast out Satan, he is divided against himself;

how shall then his kingdom stand? And,

† how can one enter into a strong man's house

and spoil his goods, except he first bindeth the

strong man, and then he will spoil his goods?

* Matt. xii. 25.

† Ib. 29.

I am come to establish a kingdom of truth SERM.

X.

and righteousness in the world, the tendency of which is directly opposite to the interests and kingdom of Satan: and is it conceivable, that, if the devil had a power to work such miracles, he should lend it to the destruction and overthrow of his own kingdom? Will Satan endeavour to establish piety and charity, purity and righteousness, in the earth? How utterly unreasonable then, and unjust, is it, to ascribe the miracles, which I work, to a power derived from me? Upon the whole, the unbelief of the *Jews* was quite inexcusable. Very justly doth our Saviour say concerning them, * *If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin: if I had not done among them the works, which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my father.* However, as hath been observed, he left them to their own counsels, and employed no force to constrain them to submit to him. So far from it, that as he very well knew, so he plainly intimateth, that a compelled submission could be of no service, nor at

* John xv. 22.

SERM. all answer the end. So that, in reality, he

X. left this matter intirely to the judgment and consciences of his hearers, and them to act in pursuance of their own free choice.

And as our Lord did thus leave his high claim to be judged of by mankind, according to the evidence, which, upon an impartial inquiry, should appear to them; so he taught his own disciples, that they should submit to no authority of others, in matters of conscience; and to assume no authority themselves. They were to call no man father, no man master, upon earth: they had but one father, who was in heaven; they had but one master, who was Christ. They were to exercise no dominion or authority over one another, but carry it as equally the servants of one master, accountable only to him, and, in matters of conscience, as absolutely independent of all others.

The apostles and other first ministers of the gospel, according to their commission from our Saviour, preached Christ to *Jew* and *Gentile*. They had no aid from any civil powers upon earth; but were to propagate Christianity, in direct opposition to all of them; and relied upon nothing, but the

the credentials, which they had received SERM.
from their great master, to recommend X.

what they taught to the conscientious acceptance of mankind. They declared the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, of which they were chosen to be witnesses. They preached the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sin ; and taught whatsoever they had in command from Christ, or the inspiration of his holy spirit. And their testimony they confirmed by the many miracles, which they were enabled to work : and, having done all this, they referred themselves to the sincere inquiries and impartial judgments of their hearers, as the only foundation, upon which they expected their embracing the Christian faith. They had no power over their hearers ; they could inflict no penalties of a temporal kind upon unbelievers ; they could propose no temporal emoluments, or advantages, to entice men to fall into that way, which was universally spoken against ; and so could rely upon nothing, but the full conviction of their judgments, and the testimony of their consciences, which as they could not hope for otherwise than by proposing sufficient evidence, so they called

SERM. upon their hearers to examine the evidence
 X. *proposed to them, and to judge for themselves; perfectly satisfied, that their great cause could not suffer by the strictest inquiries of an honest and impartial mind; but that, on the contrary, severe examination must give it strength.*

Not only so, but they also taught, and inculcated upon Christians, their rightful independence upon all human authority; and that every man was to answer for himself to God, and bear his own burthen; that no one of Christ's disciples had authority over others, in matters of conscience; that no one was to judge another, and that every man was to ** be fully persuaded in his own mind; † that whatsoever was not done out of faith, was sin*; that the faith of Christians *|| did not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*; that if a man's heart condemn him, God was greater than his heart, and knew all things; and that then only can we have confidence towards God, when our own hearts approve us. The sacred writers, especially the Apostle Paul, insist much upon these

* Rom. xiv. 5.

† Ib. xiii. 23.

|| 1 Cor. ii. 5.

things;

things ; disclaiming all dominion over the SERM.

faith of Christians, and exhorting them to X.

stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made them free. And there is not the least intimation, that any other means, than that of addressing arguments and the evidences of truth to the judgments and consciences of men, should be used. And as they recommended themselves to their hearers only in this manner ; so they acted with the greatest openness and frankness, did not conceal any part of their message, however, to men, in whom the spirit of this world obtained, it might be disagreeable ; nor study to gain the approbation of men, at the expence of unfaithfulness to their own trust. They preached the *Cross* of Christ, though it was to the *Jews* a ** stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*. They preached that purity of life, which must greatly thwart the corrupt lusts and affections of men : they preached self-denial and mortification to this world and all the temporal enjoyments ; and never flattered their hearers with the hopes of temporal prosperity : on the contrary, let them honestly know, that if they would

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

SERM. maintain a good conscience, they must expect to suffer great tribulation. In a word, they insisted upon men's endeavouring sincerely to know, and to do, the will of God, as what alone would be of any avail; and taught every man to judge for himself.

This, I humbly think, will be admitted as a just account of these matters, as they are set before us in the New Testament, and of the true foundations of the Christian faith.

Now let us consider, whether this conduct of *Jesus Christ*, and his apostles, had any thing in it, which favoured of an intention to impose upon mankind; and whether, on the contrary, it doth not afford a strong presumptive argument for the truth of our holy religion, which was the second subject of discourse proposed.

It is indeed an argument so strong, that one would think it is enough to satisfy all, who attend to it; as it must convince them, that *Jesus Christ*, and his apostles, and other ministers, did fully believe, what they taught the world; and were perfectly confident of the strength and prevalence of their

their cause, by the manifestation of the SERM.
X.

Would any set of men, conscious to themselves of putting an imposture upon the world, insist so much upon every man's examining and judging for himself? Would they insist upon sincerity and simplicity of spirit in professing of the truth, only from the full conviction of the judgment, and believing with all the heart? Would they, without seeking any subterfuges, trust their whole cause to the most severe inquiry? Indeed, a full conviction in their own minds would make them thus assured, and naturally lead them into such a conduct; but surely a consciousness of imposture would forbid it. We see, that Christianity hath been, by corrupt and designing men, made a very successful engine, for serving the purposes of this world. But then we see, that the managers of this engine have taken a very different method from that of the apostles of our Saviour; for they have taught the world to depend absolutely upon their authority; and brought the consciences of men into an absolute servitude. They have done what they could to keep the world in ignorance; and the right of private

SERM. private judgment, in matters of conscience,

X. they have set themselves against, with great

earnestness, as the most formidable enemy to their interests. Above all, they have deprived Christ's servants of the free use of the holy scriptures, and of all means of judging for themselves concerning the will of God, what he commandeth them to do, and requireth of them, as the condition of their acceptance before him. And if we look into the superstitions of the heathen world, we shall find, that there was much of mystery in them; that their priests assumed great authority, and that the world was, in a great measure, made dependent upon them. Such methods and works of darkness suit imposture; but there is in truth a power and a simplicity, which abhorreth them. It wanteth not to be concealed, but to be seen; not to put itself upon the blind and ignorant, but inviteth the strictest scrutiny; needeth no art, but by the power of evidence alone recom-mendeth itself to the impartial. As hath been already observed, if Jesus Christ, and his apostles, taught what they knew to be true, the open, bold, and unreserved method, which they took, was most natural, and

and what one would expect they should SERM.
have taken : but if it was otherwise, cer- X.
tainly they took the ready way to over-
throw their own cause.

For the farther illustration of this it must be observed, that the heathen priests of old kept a great many things profound secrets to the world ; they had certain rites and ceremonies, and, it seemeth, certain principles and doctrines too, which must be made known to none, but the initiated ; and such as were initiated were laid under the most solemn engagements, not to divulge them. All, who are in the least acquainted with the superstitions of the ancients, know this. And it is really amazing, that something, which may look like an imitation of it, amongst other abuses, crept pretty early into the Christian church. However, it had a strange appearance, that any thing, which concerned religion, and was thought to be of real moment to the happiness of mankind, should have been kept a secret from them ; and will be acknowledged to have a very suspicious look. The apostles and first ministers of our Saviour used no such methods. They had no secrets ; what they received from our Saviour

SERM. our they communicated, and have left on

X.

than mens attending to, and receiving more honest and good hearts, what they have so communicated; inviting all men to instruction in all, which they knew, concerning salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle *Paul* tells the *Ephesians*, that he had made known to them all the counsel of God; that he had kept nothing back from them, but taught laboriously in public, and from house to house; all, which he had to teach them, being comprehended in repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord *Jesus Christ*. And all mankind were to be made fully acquainted with this; nor was there any secret in the religion of Christ. This looked fair and candid; all, that the apostles knew and believed themselves, they laid open to the examination of all the world.

Another thing, which ought to be carefully observed, is, that in all religions, but that of Christ, there was a power lodged in the priests and ministers to do certain things, which were thought necessary to men's obtaining the favour of the Deity; and by which their spiritual state

was

was affected. In the law of *Moses* there

SERM.

X.

was a priesthood, instituted by divine authority, to which the service of the altar was entrusted ; and no other, but such as were of the house of *Levi* were allowed to offer sacrifices, or have any part in sacred ministrations. But this service was altogether typical of our Saviour, and of the sacrifice of himself, which he was to offer ; and when he appeared, of whom, and of the part he acted, all these were figures, they ceased. If we look into the history of the heathen world, we shall find, that the whole service of religion was, in a manner, confined to the priests ; and that the multitude depended much upon them, for rendering the gods propitious to their nation, for warding off their judgments, and obtaining prosperity and happiness. And when Christianity became so corrupted as to be, in truth, in many things an imitation of the superstition of the heathen, we find great provision was made for supporting the power and authority of the priesthood ; and for making their ministrations of the greatest and most important service. Thus, for instance, men were taught, that the virtue of the sacraments depended

SERM. depended upon them ; and how great was

X. that virtue represented to be ? And Christians were taught to have a great dependence upon the absolution of the priests, as a means of discharging the score of their guilt ; and to depend upon a power in the church, to communicate the merits of some to others, which should be available on their behalf in the sight of God. All this is the most distant possible from what the apostles of our Saviour teach. They tell us very plainly, that faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God, are the fixed terms of our acceptance ; that whosoever repenteth and believeth the gospel, is in a state of favour with God, and shall be saved. They teach, that no external rite or ceremony, without this, will be of any avail. They leave nothing in the power of any man, which may necessarily affect another in matters of salvation ; and cut off all such dependance ; leaving every man to stand or fall in the sight of God, and at the great day, according to the part, which he himself hath acted. And the ministry of the gospel, as they have represented it, is an office of service ; but not at all of power and mere authority in matters of

of conscience ; and as they lay all the SERM. stress upon faith, repentance, and holiness X. of life, so they evidently preclude themselves, as well as all others, from all pretence to such authority. This speaketh simplicity, and looketh like truth. A man doth not act a part, which savoureth of imposture, when he leaveth all things, which concern religion and salvation, to men's own judgments and consciences.

Upon the whole, if Christianity did consist in any external rite, or outward action, there would be greater room for imposture : but as it consisteth in the conviction of the truth, working in the mind, so as to beget suitable affections and dispositions of soul ; and for receiving this conviction, we are referred entirely to the evidences of truth, which are laid before the mind, and have an impartial inquiry and judgment recommended to us, in which we are accountable only to God. This surely hath as strong an appearance of simplicity and truth, as can well be imagined.

But as so much hath been said concerning faith, considered as the assent of the mind, and its persuasion concerning the truth ; it may not be improper to observe, that

SERM. that the virtue of faith, and its efficacy to

X. salvation, are not to be esteemed merely, or principally, from the degree of strength and firmness of persuasion ; but from the influence of it upon the temper and life. Though there is sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity, to beget faith in every impartial inquirer ; yet the degree of strength in it, considered as a persuasion of the truth, may in different persons, though of equal candour and ingenuity, be very different. Some may have much clearer discernment than others ; and may be much more capable of judging ; they may have more favourable opportunities of information and inquiry ; so that, though the objective evidence is the same to all, still it may appear in a much stronger light to one believer than it doth to another : and, no doubt, the firmer the persuasion, so much greater the influence of it may be expected to be ; and so much the more joy and peace in believing. But yet, that degree of faith, which is effectual to produce the full compliance and consent of the heart, and to model a temper and life according to the design of the gospel, (how- ever it may be inferior to that strength of it,

it, to which the more enlightened may attain) is all that can be declared necessary

SERM.

X.

to the purposes of salvation: For as the great end of faith is unquestionably the begetting in believers the true Christian spirit and temper; so, where this is found, and the declared end is answered, men have that, which is the faith of God's elect, tho' they may not be as strong in it as persons, who have clearer light, and a more thorough discernment.

To conclude; a revelation of the will of God, concerning us, is undoubtedly one of the most valuable favours, which can be conferred on mankind. And the revelation, with which Christians are favoured, is recommended to our acceptance, by this great circumstance, that God, * *who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by his own Son, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, by whom also he made the worlds.* Surely such an interposition as this, in our favour, ought to meet with a most grateful reception.

* Heb. i. 1.

C c

And

SERM. And the true and only acceptable way of

X, expressing our gratitude is by a cordial compliance with the design of the gospel ; and by submitting to *Jesus Christ* as our Saviour and Lord, with pure hearts, and a most stedfast resolution of doing his will in all things whatsoever he hath commanded us. And as the records of our holy religion are put into our hands, and we are taught to search the scriptures, and thence to learn the will of God concerning us ; so we ought to apply the powers, which God hath given us to that end ; not receiving things upon trust, and the authority of fallible men, where we can judge for ourselves ; that so our faith may not *stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* And it ought to be our endeavour to make progress in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ* ; but especially to add to our knowledge, faith, virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. * *For if these things be in us and abound, they make us, that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Let us remember, that the end of our knowledge is

* 2 Pet. i. 8.

practice ;

practice; and that our whole success, with SERM.
respect to the great purposes of religion, X.
dependeth on sincere obedience. Without

this, our knowledge, even the most advanced degrees of it, will be so far from being at last profitable, that it will only aggravate our guilt, and make our condemnation so much the more dreadful. * *For that servant, who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

But he, who knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: for unto whom much is given, of him much shall be required, and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.

• Luke xii. 47.

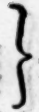
S E R M O N X I.

God's Moral Government.

PSAL. xcvi. 9.

*With righteousness shall be judge the world.*SERM.
XI.

THAT the works of nature shew contrivance and design; that certain ends are accomplished by certain means, which are fitted and were intended to serve them; that there is a regular order of causes and effects maintained from age to age; and, in a word, that the universe is the work and constantly under the direction of a superintending mind, is a matter so plain, that it is wonderful, that any thinking person could ever bring himself to doubt of it, much more to deny it; and in the room of the original intelligent almighty power to put necessity or chance, (words, which in the present

sent argument really have no meaning) to SERM. one or the other of these, as the original XI. 

cause, ascribing all things in the universe.

But when men have got the idea of an intelligent agent, who made the world and governeth it by his providence, and consider themselves as the creatures of that power, by which all things were created, and in which every individual subsisteth; when they consider the constitution of human nature, with all its powers, affections, and principles of action, as the work of God; then that sense of *right* and *wrong*, of *moral good* and *evil*, which is the great distinction of mankind from all the inferior orders, appeareth to demand particular notice; as being not only in itself considered the highest and most important faculty of the mind, but as what is given us for directing our conduct, and as what principally pointeth out to man his chief end, and that, which is his supreme good. That the sense of right and wrong must have been intended by the author of our beings, as a law or rule for directing our conduct, is evident; for it is impossible to separate a sense of right and a sense of obligation. *A thing is right, therefore it is to be done;*

C c 3

a thing

SERM. *a thing is wrong, therefore it is not to be*

XI. *done* ; is the original language of nature, with which every man is acquainted ; and while the sense of right and wrong remaineth, the heart instantly and necessarily approveth what appeareth to be right, and condemneth what is judged to be wrong.

But it is an inquiry of the utmost moment to virtue and to human happiness, how the Creator is disposed and affected towards his creatures, whom he hath placed under this law, as they observe it, or deviate from it, in their actions. It may be imagined, and this appeareth plainly to have been the sense of some persons, that, though the universe and all the creatures in it are the work of an original intelligent cause, perfectly wise, powerful, and beneficent, and the whole creation is governed by the sole superintending providence of this being, and particularly, that all the instincts and affections, planted in the heart of man, are his workmanship ; yet he doth not at all attend to the temper or behaviour of men, as being, according to the moral quality of them, the objects of his approbation or displeasure : that, though he hath given to his creatures the sense of good

good and evil, of right and wrong, as a SERM.
means of serving those purposes by them, XI.

which *he* had in view, yet he himself hath not that regard to right and wrong, which we find in our own minds, nor any thing analogous to it: and that, therefore, he is not displeased with the transgression of this law of our natures, nor hath any pleasure or complacency in our obedience: and that we are never to expect any interposition of his to give us tokens of his favour for having pursued that which is right, or of his displeasure for having done what is wrong: that men are, by the laws of nature, thoroughly furnished for serving the purposes of this life; but that this is all that is to be expected; and that by establishing and maintaining this constitution of things, the Creator hath made provision for preserving the world in that state, which will answer his original design.

Very widely different from this way of thinking is the sense of those, who consider the Supreme Being, as a lawgiver, and a moral governor, in the proper sense of that word; believing, that as he hath, in the sense of right and wrong, written a law upon the heart of every man, and hath

SERM. planted in every man a conscience to approve or disapprove of his actions, as they

XI.

are good or evil ; so he is himself attentive to the conduct of every individual ; is pleased with the conformity of his temper and actions to the law, that he hath given him, and displeased with the transgressions of it ; and will interpose to testify his pleasure or displeasure by such rewards or punishments, as perfect wisdom shall see fit and necessary to answer the end of a moral administration ; fit for supporting and encouraging virtue, as the most excellent of all things ; for discouraging vice, and so preserving a good order in his own creation. And that, though God doth not interpose in the present state of things by any acts of his, so as fully to answer what reason ultimately expecteth from a perfect moral ruler in rewarding the good and punishing the bad, yet another state of things is to be expected, in which the great design of his moral administration shall be perfected, and he, as judge of the world, will do right to every subject of his moral kingdom.

Now, whether the Supreme Being doth or doth not act the part of such a ruler, is

an


an inquiry unquestionably of the utmost SER.M.

XI.

act it, then there is an unspeakable weight laid into the scale of virtue, additional to all considerations of the beauty and excellency of it, and of the present advantages annexed to it in the pleasing approbation of conscience, and the happy fruits of it, with respect to health, character, and estate. And there is nothing, which can so effectually deter men from vice, as a thorough persuasion, that thereby they displease their Maker and Supreme Ruler, and that he will one day interpose to make them sensible of this, by inflicting punishment proportioned to their crimes. And as the dread of this must give great pain to the disobedient, so from a sense of God's moral government, and a consciousness of being the objects of his favour, the most pleasing and joyful hopes spring up to the virtuous and good. So that all men must be affected, and conduct themselves in a very different manner, as they do or do not believe, that God acteth the part of a moral ruler over them.

That in this great argument every man, who will attend to the first principles of reason

SERM. reason and morality, may come to a satisfactory decision in his own mind, let us be-

XI.  gin with those things, which are most simple and plain, and try, how far clear and sound reasoning will carry us toward a proof, that God doth act the part of such a moral ruler.

Every man findeth, that he himself, his powers and faculties, his temper, instinct, and inclinations, are the objects of his reflecting thoughts, and of various operations of his understanding, and affections of the heart. And surely no man can imagine, that the Creator of all hath not this reflecting power, by which his existence and his perfections become the objects of his own contemplation.

Again we know, that in the powers and faculties conferred upon us, and in the instincts and affections, which are planted in the heart, we have a perception of excellency, that is delightful to us. Some things, in our frame and constitution, we esteem, as they are of great use in life; other things are not only useful, but in themselves lovely. And must we not likewise believe, that the Supreme Being hath a perception of excellency in his own perfections?

fections? Or doth it not appear most SERM.

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shocking absurdity to ascribe to him perfection in the highest possible degree, and at the same time to suppose, that he discerneth no excellency in it! the most glorious state of existence possible, and yet no sense of this, nor delight resulting from the contemplation of it! The mind immediately pronounceth this the most unnatural of all conceptions.

Let us apply this particularly to the goodness of God. We see the plain footsteps of goodness in all his works. We discern it in the kind and good affections, which are planted in the heart of man: we see it in innumerable things, with which providence hath furnished us, which are not at all necessary for the support of life, but contrived merely for our delight: we discern in the general system of things about us, which doth not manifest any thing like a design formed and carried on, to make living creatures miserable, but directly the reverse of this, seeing the laws of nature, without exception, do all tend to the good and happiness of the creation. Now goodness ever appeareth to our minds excellent and lovely. And as we clearly perceive,

SERM. perceive, that God is good, and have reason to ascribe goodness to him in its highest

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perfection, can it enter into the heart of man, that he hath not a perception of excellency, that he doth not delight in his own perfect goodness? Will any man say, that it is not in its nature most excellent and lovely? And shall we imagine, that the supreme most perfect mind doth not discern this? But if he hath a perception of excellency in goodness, and loveth it, surely that, which is contrary to goodness, and is therefore discerned to be unlovely or deformed, must be the object of his aversion.

To say, that God hath no perception of excellence in his goodness, and that he hath no delight in the contemplation of it, is to say, that he is incapable of the highest happiness, of which we have any idea: not only so, but that he is incapable of that happiness, which he hath actually communicated to his creatures, and which is the most perfect enjoyment of being: an happiness, which surely cannot be incompatible with the highest perfection, but which, indeed, according to all our ideas and reasonings, necessarily springeth from it. In the

the same manner, we may reason concerning any quality or disposition in the

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divine mind, that falleth under a moral consideration, as becoming, as lovely, as right, the contrary to which is wrong.

Farther, as God hath planted in his creatures a power, by which they apprehend what is good and right, and approve it; and condemn what is evil and wrong : it is certain, that he must himself *know* what is good and right, what is evil and wrong. For he must necessarily know that, of which he hath given to his creatures a clear perception. And if so, and at the same time he is utterly regardless of right and wrong, this is not only not what reason directeth us to suppose in the most perfect mind, but it is that, from which we cannot separate the idea of *depravity*, and the greatest imperfection ; an insensibility to, an utter negligence of, good and evil, of right and wrong, appearing clearly to the mind ! Doth not this carry in it the idea of the greatest defect possible ? And will ever nature, will ever the heart of man, suggest any such thing, with respect to the original of all excellency and perfection ?

Let

SERM. Let this, then, be fixed in the first place,
XI. that God hath a perception of excellency

in his own goodness and righteousness; that he is delighted and happy in them; and that whatsoever is contrary to them, must be to him disagreeable, and the object of dislike and aversion. And when this is fixed as a principle not to be contested, it will be perfectly clear to the mind, as a consequence from it, that God hath planted in the heart of man the sense of right and wrong, not merely to serve certain purposes in his creation, which were necessary to the accomplishment of his own great design, without being himself at all affected by any such sense; but that he hath given it as a law, with our obedience to which he cannot but be pleased, as he must be displeased with our negligence of it, and our transgressions against it. If he hath complacency in his own moral perfection, he must necessarily have complacency in those moral agents, who, by obeying his laws, became, according to the measure of their capacity, conformable to it; and they, who do not so obey, must necessarily fall under his displeasure. And every man will see it is impossible,

impossible, that a being, who perceiveth SERM. 2
excellency in goodness, and deformity in XI.
evil ; to whom the former, as such, is
lovely, and the latter hateful, should not
regard moral agents, who do that, which
is good, with approbation and love, and
with dislike and displeasure, those, who do
evil.

What, that can be called perfection,
could we ascribe to a being, who had no
respect to good and evil, to right and
wrong, in his conduct ? Without this
respect there is no such thing as excellency
or worth at all. On the contrary, in hav-
ing it to the highest perfection, according
to all our ideas and apprehensions, the
highest excellency consisteth. And surely
nothing can be more unnatural, than to
believe, that the Supreme Being, who go-
verneth the whole universe, and who hath
made a multitude of creatures capable of
discerning right and wrong, will support
that respect to this distinction, which con-
stituteth a right moral character, and which
maketh his creatures resemble his own per-
fection.

Hence it will be evident, that the per-
fect goodness of God is not to be considered
as

SERM. as a principle of action exerting itself indiscriminately, to communicate all possible

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pleasure and happiness to his creatures, without regard to moral characters. To do so, might, in some sense, be called goodness; but it could not possibly consist with that distinction between moral agents, as by doing that, which is good, they become necessarily the objects of divine approbation, or by doing evil they become necessarily the objects of disapproval; which distinction God will ever maintain, and which his own unchangeable perfection maketh it impossible for him to neglect.

In this the foundation is laid of a moral government, under which the good, and obedient to the laws, which God hath given them, are not only assured of being the objects of his approbation and favour, but have reason to expect, that he, who is the sovereign ruler of the universe, will testify his approbation, by taking care of, and making them happy: and the disobedient and wicked have reason to apprehend, that they shall suffer under his displeasure. This is what nature directeth us to look for from a perfect moral ruler, and that he will, by certain acts of his own, reward the

the good and dutiful, and punish transgressors. Here it is to be considered, that,

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in the present state of things, God hath established a constitution, by which he hath annexed joy and delight to the practice of righteousness, and manifold other advantages, with respect to health, reputation, and estate; and so ordered things, that the sinner shall be exposed to suffering, in these respects, by his own perverse ways; and we frequently see great misery the natural and unavoidable consequence of vice. This constitution is of very great moment, and indeed, in some respects, the principal thing in the divine administration, and sheweth evidently, that the Supreme Being is a friend to virtue; and therein we discover most important steps of a moral government. For while that constitution remaineth, virtue will be, in a great measure, reward, and vice punishment to itself. But surely this is not all, that is to be expected under a perfect moral administration. For if God should no otherwise interpose to testify his pleasure or displeasure, as his subjects have or have not obeyed his laws, it would be just the same thing, as if there were no superintendent of our conduct

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SERM. dust and actions at all. And if we should
 XI. suppose, that such a constitution, once
 framed, could subsist without any attention
 of the author to it, or care of it, or any
 interposition of his whatsoever; it would
 be the same thing, as if there were no God
 at all. A perfect moral government im-
 plieth in it, that the Supreme Ruler is at-
 tentive to every individual, and that as he
 is pleased or displeased with the moral con-
 duct, so he will by certain acts make his
 pleasure or displeasure most sensibly mani-
 fest; so that the dutiful and obedient shall
 find themselves gainers by having rendered
 themselves the objects of his favour, and
 the rebellious shall suffer under his dis-
 pleasure.

For the illustration of this, let it be at-
 tended to, that there are many things the
 objects of our hopes and fears, which are
 intirely in the sovereign power of God, and
 are not at all connected with, or dependent
 upon, that original constitution, that hath
 been mentioned, in which many advantages
 are annexed to the practice of virtue, and
 disadvantages and sufferings to vice. Such
 are, principally, the continuance or ex-
 tinction of our being, which is a matter, that
 that

that lieth at the foundation of all. And SERM.

such are all the favours and blessings, and XI.

all the evils and calamities, which, by divine providence, are appointed in our lot, quite independent of our conduct; and yet no man but must be sensible, that his state, with respect to happiness or misery, may be greatly affected by them. Now from God, considered as a perfect moral ruler, such an attention to individuals is to be expected, that in determining those matters, which are wholly in his sovereign power, and quite independent of any agency of ours, he should shew, that he loveth and approveth of the good, and is displeased with the wicked; and that the administration should be such, that, without exception, men should receive according to their works. Particularly, if we are at present deep sufferers by studying to do our duty, and to please our Maker; if we meet with persecution in character, estate, or life, by wicked oppressors, nature directeth us to hope, that he, as Sovereign Lord and Judge, will interpose to redress our grievances, and right our wrongs; and that he will not permit unrighteousness, finally to triumph in our sufferings.

SERM. sufferings. And if we saw a most distress-

XI. ful lot appointed by providence for a person of worth, while the wicked flourished in all imaginable prosperity, we should expect such a turn, as would compensate for the sufferings of the righteous, and make it manifest, that God was his friend; while the wicked should find, that, notwithstanding his past prosperity, he was really an object of disobedience to his Maker. And we should most assuredly expect, that what ever became of the bad and the vicious, the Governor of the World would not destroy the beings of such as obeyed, and made it their study to please him; but that he would continue them in existence, and that in such a state, as would give opportunity and encouragement to the practice of righteousness, the most excellent thing in his creation.

Such is the language of nature concerning the government of God; and violence must be done to nature, and the sentiments of the heart opposed, when men go into contrary schemes. Who can stand by it, as a thing, that appeareth natural and rational, that God doth not perceive an excellency in his own goodness, and righteousness,

ousness, and truth ; that these are not ob- SERM.

XI.

and the contrary disagreeable ? Or that he knoweth right and wrong, good and evil ; but with the clearest perception of them, is quite insensible to them, without all approbation of the one or disapprobation of the other ; and doth not act with any respect to them, considered as excellent, or the contrary ? That he hath planted a sense of right and wrong in the hearts of his creatures, to be the rule of their conduct ; but is neither pleased or displeased with them, on account of their acting or not acting agreeably to this law ? That the most affectionate and dutiful are not, on account of their being so, the more the objects of his favour ; nor the most wicked and abandoned rendered, on account of their crimes, the more the objects of his displeasure ? Or that, supposing the former should be the objects of his favour, and the others the objects of his displeasure, yet he will never interpose to make them sensible of this ; and that, though he hath all power and authority, and perfectly knoweth every individual, yet the best and most worthy shall not, by any interposition or

act

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SERM. act of his, after having at first formed a

XI. constitution of nature, be the better for his love; nor the state of the most worthless the worse for his displeasure? That oppressed righteousness shall never be taken into his protection; nor triumphant wickedness suffer under his censure? These are sentiments, which the reason and heart of man can never embrace. They are not only repugnant to all our ideas of divine perfection, but indeed inconsistent with that regard to virtue, which we evidently see in the original constitution of nature:

But as, in these observations and reflections, I have endeavoured to point out the foundations, upon which we believe God's moral government of the world; so it hath been intimated, that, in the present state of things, the design and scheme of a perfect moral administration is not completed: that is, we do not see such a distinction in all respects made between the good and the bad, as, under a government perfectly righteous and impartial, we might rationally expect. The original constitution of nature, and the laws of it, which are so friendly to virtue, have been taken notice of. But with respect to the distribution of

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the favours of providence, which have no SERM.

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fruit and result of it, we see, that the distinction between the good and bad is not, in every instance, observed; nay, the distributions of providence are, in a great measure, promiscuous. It is an old and just observation, that no man *knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him; * that all things come alike to all; that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and bad, to the clean and the unclean, to him, that sacrificeth, and to him, that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner, and he, that sweareth, as he, that feareth an oath.* And agreeably to this, the Psalmist observeth, *† that the wicked prosper; that there are no bands in their death, that their strength is firm, they are not troubled like other men, neither are they plagued like others. Their eyes stand out with fat, they have more than their hearts could wish. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.* On the other hand, it is often seen, that the best and worthiest persons suffer under deep calamity, such as

* Eccles. ix. 1, 2. † Psal. lxxiii. 3, 4, 5, 7, 12,

GOD'S Moral Government.

sickness and disorder of body, penury and want, reproach and contempt. And what is most of all to be considered, is, that in innumerable instances they have suffered extremely, even to death, by doing justice to their own consciences, and obeying the laws of their Maker. They have been, in the course of providence, delivered into the hands of cruel persecutors, who have put them to exquisite torments, and to death. * *They have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, were destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.*

All, who are acquainted with the history of the world, know, that men, who would be dutiful and loyal to the Supreme Ruler, have been often exposed to such sufferings as these, and have lost life, and, upon supposition, that death is the utter extinction of it, have lost being, in the support and defence of the cause of truth and righteousness.

• Heb. xi. 36—39.

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ness. Now are these events, which we

SERM.

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would expect under a perfect moral administration? Are they consistent with the very first principles concerning God's love of, and regard to, virtue; and his displeasure at vice, upon supposition, that the scene is intirely closed in this world? Under a perfect moral administration, is virtue, in any one instance, in any one individual, to be finally unhappy? Are the wrongs and grievances of the good and righteous, those wrongs, which they suffer in the cause of righteousness, and for the sake of it, never to be redressed? And is wickedness finally to triumph over oppressed worth and integrity? Can it be so under a perfect moral administration, which will render to every man according to his works? No: this is a thing, which cannot be received as truth; nor ever will fit easy upon the mind. And what are we then to believe? That the case is as hath been represented; that virtue, in innumerable instances, doth suffer deeply, even to death, without any interposition of the Supreme power in its favour, is evident. That, therefore, the design of a moral administration is not perfected in this world,

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SERM. is apparent. What are we then to con-

XI. clude? That God doth not act the part of a moral governor at all? This, we have seen, is utterly irrational, and inconsistent with all our ideas of divine perfection. What can remain, then, but that we conclude, that the scene is not closed in the present state of things; and that we shall exist after death, and in that state of existence, the scheme of a moral government, of which we evidently see the foundations laid in this world, shall be carried on to perfection. This is that, in which we must rest. This the heart immediately embraceth, as the only clear solution of all the difficulties, with which, upon any other hypothesis, we are embarrassed.

Many are the arguments, which have been offered for the immortality of the soul, taken from the nature of it as an immaterial substance, from the extent of its powers and faculties, and the improvement without end, of which it is capable; from that, which is manifestly the supreme good of such a creature, and which hath no necessary connection with the enjoyments of mere animal life. But indeed the strongest and most satisfying argument,

ment, which reason affordeth, seems to be SERM.
taken from God's moral government. If XI.

he acteth the part of a moral ruler at all, we cannot doubt, but that his government will be most perfect, and under which no individual will find just reason to complain. But if there be one single instance, in which a person perisheth in support and defence of the cause of truth and righteousness, this cannot be the case; there would then be a foundation for complaint. God hath planted in the heart of man certain principles, by which he intended the conduct should be regulated. In acting upon these principles, and doing the will of God, men have often been obliged to give up all temporal possessions and enjoyments, and even life itself. These they must have parted with; or have violated their own consciences, and acted in contradiction to the will of God. And yet under a perfect moral administration, under which these sacrifices in the cause of virtue must be had in the highest estimation, they are to have no real redress for this suffering, but sink at death into non-existence; and are not at all distinguished from the most worthless and abandoned character.

Every

Sermon. Every impartial and attentive person will

XI. immediately judge, that it is impossible, that this should be the case; or that the expectations, which we cannot avoid forming upon the principles in this discourse laid down, should be all mere delusion, and that we should be finally cheated, even to the loss of our existence, by cleaving to that, which, according to our present frame, must appear to us above all things excellent, lovely, and pleasing to our Maker. If then there be a perfect moral government, there must be a future state. If we give up the latter, we must give up the former. And indeed every one, who will candidly weigh the arguments for it, will be so convinced, that nothing, but a demonstration of the impossibility of our existing after death, could make him believe, that, at death, the scene is intirely closed; and surely no man will undertake to demonstrate this. Is it not most natural, indeed unavoidable, for oppressed virtue, suffering under vexatious persecution and ill usage of every kind, suffering torments and death, to look up to the power above as its sanctuary, to look for redress and deliverance? And the mind could

could be overwhelmed by nothing, so much *SEEM* as an imagination, that there is no such power, or that no friendship or protection is to be expected from it. To be persuaded of this, must make the world appear a gloomy scene indeed, and the great family of God, as if it had no head, seeing those purposes of government, which are the most material, would not be at all answered.

Nay, in what sense at all can God be said to be the governor of moral agents, if he hath no regard to their actions, as good or evil? And they are therefore, to have no respect at all to him, from whom, however they conduct life, they are to expect neither love nor hatred, have nothing to hope, nothing to fear, and so may be said, in truth, to have nothing to do with him. And there really seemeth to be no medium, either we must regard God as our moral ruler, with whom, therefore, we have a very near, and the most important of all connection; or else think and act, as if there were no God at all over us. And what is of the utmost importance in this matter, is, that our constitution naturally leads us to fall in with this conception of God, as our moral ruler, to whom we are always accountable. Whereas by entertaining con-

ceptions,

SERM. ceptions of an intelligent being, who is

XI. the cause of all things; and who hath given us the sense of right and wrong, and yet doth not at all regard our moral conduct, the utmost violence is done to our natural conceptions of the order of the moral world, the mind is intirely unhinged, and is lost in confusion and dissatisfaction.

Now what nature and reason suggest concerning the government of God, we find fully established, and confirmed in the holy scriptures, where, by exprefs revelation, we are assured, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to his works. Under the Jewish administration, which was of a very peculiar kind, the sanctions of the divine law were taken from temporal things. Prosperity was promised to that people, while they were obedient to the laws of God; and great adversity was threatened, if they should be rebellious against him. And that whole oeconomy did plainly suppose an extraordinary interposition, peculiar to the Jews. But that dispensation is now superseded. Our Blessed Saviour hath introduced a religion fitted and designed to be universal; and all the sanctions of his

laws are taken from the world to come. SERM.

He hath brought life and immortality **XI.**

for the righteous clearly to light, and hath pointed out a state of punishment for the rebellious and impenitent.* He teacheth us, that there cometh a time, when the Servants of God, and the subjects of his kingdom, shall be called to an account for their improvement of the talents, wherewith they have been intrusted; and that while the slothful and wicked servant shall be rejected and punished, the dutiful, and he, who was attentive to his master's will, and to the business allotted to him, shall be accepted and rewarded; and that in proportion to the improvement he hath made, when the great judge cometh, he will call all mankind to an account. † He will separate them according to their real characters, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; that the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal. ‡ He teacheth, that they, who suffer for righteousness sake, shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, and that upon

* Mat. xxv. 14. and Luke xix. 12. † Mat. xxv.

‡ 1 Mat. v. 10.

SERM. this account their sufferings may be matter

XI. of real and exceeding joy to them! * And that the righteous shall hereafter shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their father. § He sheweth us, that they only shall be accepted of God, who do his will; and that all hopes, founded upon any thing else, is building upon the sand. The sacred writers, after him, assure us of the same things; *That to them, who by a patient continuance in well doing, seek after glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life shall be given; and that to them, who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, tribulation and anguish, are in reserve, to every soul of man; who doth evil, whether of Jew or Gentile, for there is no respect of Persons with God. * That the wicked shall not inherit the kingdom of God; neither fornicators nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves nor covetous, nor extortioners, nor revilers, nor drunkards, shall inherit that kingdom.* But that for them, who have finished their course happily, there is a crown of righteousness in reserve, which God, the righteous

* Mat. xiii. 43. § See Mat. vii. 21. 29. † Rom. ii. 6. 12. * 1 Cor. vi. 9.

*judge will give to all them, who love his SERM. appearance. That * as a man soweth, so XI.*
shall be also reap: He, who soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he, who soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. That we ought not to be weary of well-doing; for in due time we shall reap, if we faint not. And as the holy scriptures clearly point out a future state, which shall be a state of rewards and punishments, so they use the very strongest expressions and the most significant metaphors, to set forth the happiness of the righteous, and the sufferings of the wicked and finally impenitent.

But as mankind are all of them chargeable with guilt and great moral imperfections, and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so repentance and remission of sins are preached in the name of Christ to all nations; and we know, that if the unrighteous forsaketh his way, and turneth to the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and abundantly pardon him †; and that † there is no condemnation to them, who are in Christ Jesus the Lord, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. We

* Gal. vi. 7. † Is. lv. 7.

† Rom. viii. 1.

SERM. are likewise clearly informed, that not fin-
 XI. less perfection, but sincerity, is the term of
 our acceptance with God. And we have

all possible encouragement to obedience, from the great and precious promises of the assurance of God's holy spirit, and that he will always countenance and encourage our good attempts, and give us effectual aid. In a word, we are assured, that all, who come up to the terms of acceptance declared in the gospel, shall be acquitted in the great day of judgment.

In all this the gospel speaketh language, which must be perfectly agreeable and pleasing to every ingenuous mind. And therein we have the authority of God expressly interposed to establish our faith of his moral government, and to point out clearly the measures of his administration, which must to all, who are unprejudiced, appear most worthy of his spotless purity, and infinite goodness ; and which proceed with that regard to true worth and holiness, which is due to that, which, in the judgment of all, who can discern, must be the most excellent of all things. Indeed this may be said to be the only thing, which is excellent, in as much as nothing is truly
 so,

so, but by deriving from it. Power and SERM.


understanding, in the utmost extent, *sepa-* XI.

rate from goodness and rectitude, must appear great and dreadful ; but they are not lovely : it is by their being under the influence of goodness, that they become amiable. And if we separate from any being, any character, righteousness and goodness, there remaineth nothing in our idea of it, which the mind pronounceth to be excellent. Thus I have endeavoured to explain to you the foundations of God's moral government, and shall now make some practical reflections upon the subject.

First it must undoubtedly be matter of great joy to every well-disposed and good mind, that righteousness is constantly the object of principal attention to the Supreme Being, that it will be constantly under his care and protection ; that however it may suffer in the present state of imperfection and discipline, yet it shall be finally happy ; and that while we have the testimony of conscience to our sincere endeavours to conduct life according to the law originally written upon our hearts, and the precepts given us in the word of God, studying to

SERM. correct whatsoever we know to have been

XI. amiss in us, and to cultivate every worthy and good disposition of soul, we shall be the objects of our Maker's love and complacential regard, that he will take care of our interests, and make us for ever happy. That as the rules and measures of his administration are unalterable, and he ever will do what is right, so in all events it will be well with the righteous. Were it not so, and we should suppose, that the Supreme Ruler did not love righteousness, and would not take care of it, in what a melancholy light must the universe appear to a virtuous mind? What a painful reflection, that, what he cannot but account the most excellent thing in the creation of God, should be neglected? That in the eye of the Parent of the Universe, right and wrong, good and evil, the very best and the very worst moral character, made no difference with respect to his regard and favour. These are things, which must greatly discourage the votaries of virtue, and make way for the prevalence of all irregular and vicious passions. For who but must imagine, that the planting in the heart of man a sense of excellency in virtue,

true was intended as a mere delusion, if it SERM.
is supposed, that the Almighty Governor XI. 

of the world maketh no account of it ?
And what man would be esteemed to act a
wise part, in suffering for the sake of vir-
tue and of conscience, in losing his very
being in that cause ? Nay, if there is no
regard in the power, who governeth all, to
right and wrong, who could form any
judgment of his administration ? And
what rule could we have for directing our
expectations from it ? On the contrary,
how pleasing to think, that he, who go-
verneth all, is perfectly and unchangeably
good and holy ; that he will ever act the
part of a friend to righteousness ; that the
whole of his administration will be regu-
lated with an eye to it, and that his al-
mighty power will ever be engaged in the
support and defence of it ? How pleasing
to think, that as his eye is upon every indi-
vidual, so he will graciously notice and re-
ward every good action ; that the least
thing, done from good and worthy prin-
ciples, shall not be over-looked, shall not
be forgotten ? How perfectly in character
did our Blessed Saviour speak, when he
said,

SERM. said, * *Whoever shall give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward?*

It is very comfortable to think, that by doing that, which is good, we become the objects of our Maker's esteem and love. This above all things gratifieth that desire of honour, which is so natural to the human heart, and prevaieth most in the most ingenuous minds. But to know farther, that virtue and true holiness will be the objects of our Maker's care, and that in all events he will provide, that it shall be well with the righteous, is the very strongest encouragement to the practice of righteousness, which can be given. As on the other hand, what can so effectually deter men from vice, as to know, that by doing that, which is evil, they fall under the displeasure of the Supreme Being, that they shall not go unpunished; but have such penalties inflicted upon them, as are necessary to serve the purposes of his perfect moral administration. In a word, as there is, in this administration, the most perfect and beautiful order, so without it, there is nothing, which could be called

* Matt. x. 42.

order,

order, and we could have no security of SERM.

XI.

happiness in existence. For surely an indiscriminating goodness could give us no such security, a goodness exerted consistently with all the oppression of the virtuous, and all the malignity of the bad and vicious, and making no distinction between them.

It is a strong presumption in favour of the religion of Christ, as a religion of divine authority, that it hath so clearly and fully established the belief of God's moral government. What we are led to by the principles of reason and morality, is fully explained and brought home to the heart of every man by the Christian revelation. Hereby every man is enabled to judge, whether he is, or is not, the object of his Maker's favour; and whether he is to look for reward or punishment, happiness or misery, in the world to come. And having mentioned this strong presumption in favour of Christianity, give me leave farther to observe, that the opposition, which hath been made to the religion of Christ, and attempts to overthrow the authority of it, may be owing, partly at least, to the lusts of men, those irregular and impure lusts, which can-

SERM. not bear the severity of the Christian discipline, and must be ever at enmity with

XI. the purity of the Christian spirit. Where

men have not learned to deny themselves, but will indulge in unlawful gratifications, the Christian religion will stand grievously in their way, as it presenteth to their minds future scenes exceedingly awful, a righteous judgment to come, and severe punishment in reserve for the wicked and impenitent. But should such persons be able to overthrow, in their own judgments, the authority of that religion, they are never the nearer their great purpose of providing for the tranquillity of their minds in vicious courses, while they have reason to believe God's moral government of the world. To make themselves quite easy, it is necessary, that they should get the better of all the principles of natural religion, as well as of Christianity. And this is a thing never to be done. These principles have such a foundation in reason and nature, and in the sense of right and wrong, that, till this is intirely exterminated, all their attempts must be vain. And on the other hand, no man, who believeth God's government, and can be pleased, and think himself

himself happy, under such an administration, but must be a friend to the religion of Christ, and with the universal prevalence of the true spirit of it. And if any man, should be capable of rooting out of his mind all the principles of natural religion, and of exterminating the sense of good and evil, of right and wrong, intirely; what a state he must be in? lost to all sense of excellency, and beauty in life! lost to all human enjoyment! incapable of being esteemed or beloved! not disposed to confer, unworthy of receiving any favour! Words cannot describe it.


But, in the second place, as we do all profess most firmly to believe our maker's moral government, let us act a part worthy of such a persuasion. Setting God ever before us, let us endeavour, in all respects, to approve ourselves to him, accounting it not only our unquestionable duty, but our highest interest to do those things, which are pleasing, and avoiding, as the very greatest evil, whatsoever is displeasing in his sight. What can our principal business in human life be, but to do the will of God? If this great point is not attended to, what

what can our labours and diligence in any other matters avail to the true ends and purposes of our being? How ridiculous, and absurd an appearance that person maketh, who employeth himself in every thing else, but of his proper business is utterly negligent! *And let no man deceive us; he who doth righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Our religion, to answer the declared end, must consist in that temper and course of life, which is an imitation of God; it must consist in purity, in chastity, in the fruits of the spirit, which are goodness, righteousness, and truth. These are the things, which make men meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. And that religion, which is summed up in the love of God and charity, is what faith was intended to produce; and is the great design of the gospel, in which sincere Christians with * *open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* And it is the most manifest abuse of the gospel, and of the goodness and mercy of God, made manifest in it, to mis-

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

represent it so, that it shall be understood
to undermine the foundations of true mo-
rality, and of that government, under which
every individual shall be accepted or re-
jected, according to his real character, and
shall reap as he hath sowed. Believe it,
there must be repentance from dead works,
there must be holiness of heart, and life,
there must be the love of God, there must
be an intire character formed; or we can-
not rationally hope for acceptance. This
is the language of nature, as well as of the
holy scriptures every where.

Thirdly, for such as continue in a wicked
course of life, how awful the apprehen-
sions, which arise from the moral govern-
ment of God! They are unquestionably,
the objects of his displeasure; and this will
be made manifest to them, one day, in the
most sensible manner. They may, for a
while, flourish, and have all that heart can
wish; but it will not be always so. The
holy scriptures, as I have already observed,
give us very strong representations of the
misery of bad men, in a state of punish-
ment. And what penalties, what degrees
of punishment, it may be fit for the righte-
ous

SERM. XI. ous judge of the world to inflict, that the ends of a perfect moral administration may be answered, who can tell? I am afraid, some persons greatly impose upon themselves, in this matter, not willing to admit the thoughts of any thing, which to them appeareth severe in the divine administration. They know, that God is infinitely merciful and good; that it is impossible he should have pleasure in the miseries of his creatures; and that it is no way probable, that there should be such grievous sufferings of bad men hereafter, as some would persuade them to believe; To this it may be answered: that God cannot have pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures; that is, cannot have pleasure, merely in putting them to pain, is most certain; and that he is infinitely good and merciful, we see from the whole of his administration, and especially, we see it in the gospel. But at the same time, it is no less certain, that he will make a distinction between the good and the bad, the obedient and rebellious against his authority; and that he will be just, and true to himself, as the supreme ruler, in answering, in the most perfect

perfect manner, the ends of his government; and what punishment infinite wisdom may see fit and necessary to these ends, he will inflict upon the wicked, and impenitent. In truth, nothing can be more terrible to wicked men, than the certainty we have, that God ruleth in perfect righteousness. Were we to imagine any thing capricious in his administration, any thing, which could be called humour, or passion, there might be hope, that, sometimes, at least, it might take a turn, favourable to the bad. But when there is nothing done, but what is perfectly righteous, no punishment inflicted, but what perfect wisdom directeth, and what perfect goodness approveth, we are sure, that the righteous Lord will be inflexible in it, and that his measures will never vary. Notwithstanding his infinite goodness, of which, we have the clearest and most satisfying proof, yet we see, that in this World, there have been dreadful instances of suffering and misery, in the course of providence, inflicted upon his creatures. In the sacred history, we meet with many very awful, and affecting accounts of this kind

SERM. kind, in which God is said, to have intended the punishment, for wicked generations of men, or of particular persons. And in other history, we meet with frequent instances of dreadful calamities, befalling nations, families, and individuals. All these are consistent with the most perfect goodness of the supreme ruler; and this shews, that goodness, in its utmost extent and perfection, may admit of severity, especially, in inflicting proper punishments upon the wicked and rebellious; and shews what may be expected in that state, which is expressly declared to be a state of retribution. This ought to be carefully attended to, and deeply impressed upon our minds.

And I am sure it highly concerneth us, to deal very impartially with ourselves, in searching and trying our ways, and judging, whether our state be such, as to render us the objects of God's favour and approbation, or of his displeasure. And there are very plain reasons laid down to us in the holy scriptures, by which we may form this judgment; and if we are in a state of favour with God, may attain to comfortable

able satisfaction concerning it. But should SERM.

XI.

conviction, that our moral state is bad, and that we are not in favour with God; what remaineth, but repentance from dead works, as the only thing, that can make an alteration in our state for the better? Repentance, by which I mean a real and thorough change of the temper and life, from evil to good, a thorough reformation. Let me, in conclusion, recommend to your most serious thoughts the affecting expressions of the Prophet *Jeremiab*, speaking in the name of God concerning the part, which he acteth as the governor of the world, *chap. ix. ver. 24. Thus saith the Lord; let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him, that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*



3 1 11 1 2

XI.

